

*Softwood Lumber*

States to impose a countervailing duty on softwood lumber exports from Canada.

So my intervention today is nothing new since, in 1986, when the United States acted the same way with regard to our softwood lumber exports, I rose in this House to express the concern of the forest industry and of workers from my area. I said at that time, on October 21, 1986, that the decision made by the Americans was unjustified and unacceptable and that the government, along with the industry, the unions and the provinces, had to express its dissatisfaction and even threaten to take political and trade measures to retaliate against the Americans if they did not reconsider their decision.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would never have thought at the time that, six years later, on March 11, 1992, we would have yet another debate on that dispute with our American friends.

• (2250)

Since the U.S. commerce department imposed this new 14.5 per cent tax on all exports from Canada, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and the Minister for International Trade have reacted angrily to the U.S. decision to spring this tax on an industry that is so important to a riding like mine.

Mr. Speaker, if you happened to be a worker in the resource industry in Abitibi—Témiscamingue, you would be living in very anxious times.

When I look at our farmers and what they have to go through with the GATT talks and article XI—it is pretty obvious there is a lot of concern among our farmers. They told us all about it, and they know that the government will stand by its position and will continue to fight for clarification of article XI, so our farmers can have some peace of mind.

But now we have another crisis involving the forestry sector. God knows we didn't need that in a recession that has had a severe impact on remote areas. I know how worried they are. I would like to give them the assurance—people have been saying this since the beginning of this dispute a few weeks ago—that we will not back down and that we are going to win, just as we won in 1982 and with the memorandum that was signed in 1986. We will argue our case again, because we know that we are not

engaged in unfair competition with the Americans as far as our softwood exports are concerned, and we will prove it.

The problem is that there is always a delay, and every day or week that goes by is one too many when exports are your living, and especially when you have a sawmill that employs 15, 20 or 25 workers. Big companies, although it isn't easy for them either, are in a better position to absorb this kind of tax, especially since we know that in the end it will be refunded because we will win our case.

The situation is quite different for the smaller sawmills which are getting very nervous because they are starting to wonder whether they are strong enough financially to deal with this incredible decision by the Americans. And I think that is where we should start, Mr. Speaker, because we heard several times this evening that this is the third time in 10 years we are having the same kind of debate all over again. Unfortunately, our American friends didn't realize they don't have a good case and that we do.

What are the alternatives, what should we do to try to put an end to this type of harassment by our American neighbours, who as we know are tough business people to deal with? That is why we put in place a framework, like the free trade agreement, with at least some kind of mechanisms to make sure we would have in the future a tribunal to examine any litigation or trade dispute we might have with the United States.

But how can we, at this point in time, help our businesses and our workers, specially the most vulnerable? I think there may be a way. As you know, Mr. Speaker, companies and businesses now have to pay a 14.5 per cent bond, which many small businesses are unable to afford.

Since small businesses in Quebec and in my own riding do not have the financial means to come up with that money, why not ask the government to keep a close eye on this issue? Why do we not ask the government to help pay the bond of those companies, especially since we are sure to win? It is not a big risk for the government to take, but what sense of security would it bring to small and medium businesses which cannot afford to pay that bond. So the government, through the Department of Finance, could help these businesses.