

species. There is not a thinking, honest member of the EEC Parliament with an ounce of integrity, given the facts, who believes the seal hunt had to be stopped to save the species. There is not one member of the EEC Parliament who, given the facts, believes that the seal herd was in any way in danger. But those EEC parliamentarians voted to ban the hunt nevertheless, because that was the view being expressed by their constituents who had heard only one side of the debate.

● (1210)

I was a member of the previous Liberal administration that in my view was wrongly advised to confront the protest organizations on that issue head on rather than going over their heads to the people who were being targeted by those protest organizations. Instead of a name calling exchange with Greenpeace, or whoever it might have been, the Government of the day would have been much wiser to go directly to the public of Europe with solid information and unemotional appeals. That approach was not followed vigorously enough in order to blunt what happened.

We learned a lesson as a result of that, despite our good intentions. Let us apply that lesson to what is happening with our forest industry today and take whatever means are necessary to speak directly to the American public. It is only in that way, with the determination to do the job right and use whatever means are necessary to make the case, will we be able to lift this cloud of uncertainty from over the heads of Canada's forest workers and, indeed, an industry that has not had the best returns in the last six years that one would like to see.

[Translation]

Mr. Fontaine: Mr. Speaker, today I heard the Hon. Member for Humber-Port au Port-St. Barbe (Mr. Tobin) defending the interests of our forests and the forestry industry in Canada. I wonder how he can reconcile his party's attitude over the last twenty years with the statements he made today.

When the Liberals were in power, they promoted rapid and uncontrolled harvesting of our Canadian forests. At the time, you were granting subsidies aimed exclusively at supporting the cost of cutting, transporting and sawing lumber. At the time, it did not occur to you that Canadians would be better off with having the right balance between harvesting and renewal of our forests, but renewal was not one of your concerns. Reforestation provides a return in sixty or eighty years, and so it was not politically attractive. Here, as in other areas, you preferred to be consumers of our natural resources. You failed to consider the need for renewal.

I would therefore ask the Hon. Member why this Government failed to respect the natural balance, except in a few marginal cases, and why his Government, and this cannot be denied, always promoted exports of our raw materials and never helped to establish, on a national basis, the processing plants we need to upgrade and enhance the value of our forest resources in this country.

Supply

It is useless to protest against the U.S. threat. You should have done so years ago and planned for the future, because in forestry, one must plan 60 years ahead.

[English]

Mr. Tobin: Mr. Speaker, the only word I can use to describe the Hon. Member's intervention is "sad". We are in the House today to discuss a motion which simply states:

That this House recognize the dire circumstances faced by Canadian forest workers by impending legislative initiatives of the U.S. Congress and the equally dire circumstances faced by Canadian farmers as a result of the U.S. Farm Bill and condemns this Government for its failure to adequately protect the viability of these two vital sectors of the Canadian economy.

We stand in the House today in the hope of sensitizing Canadian parliamentarians and, through them, the people of Canada, to the situation facing Canada's forestry workers and to the real dangers to an industry that employs a million Canadians.

It is tragic that when I give a speech asking the Government to allow this to be a non-partisan issue so that we may work together to develop a means to prevent this threat, a Member who obviously knows little if anything about the forest industry is only motivated to stand on his feet and simply berate us and question what we did for 20 years. It is tragic that the Member, having heard the discussion, could not address the plight of Canadian forestry workers or what action we ought to take as a Parliament to find a remedy to that threat, but could only ask what we have done for the last 20 years. Is it not possible, in the so-called spirit of reform, that there are some issues of national importance about which Members could stand and participate in a constructive debate in the House? Is it not possible that we could put aside our partisanship on some issues, as we are learning to do in legislative committees, in order to write better Bills and assist the Government in formulating policy to deal with problems, rather than worrying about being blamed for mistakes?

It is not my purpose to stand here today and assign blame. Despite the comments of the back-bencher, I believe that the Ministers who are sitting in the House today are aware of the gravity of this problem and do not dismiss our concern as mere criticism of the Americans again. I believe Ministers are so aware that they probably spend much of their time trying to address the problem. I hope the reason they are in the House today is not to defend themselves—at least as far as my comments are concerned, because I do not intend to attack the Government—but to sense the consensus and the will of Parliament and the people of Canada to use all the legitimate means at our disposal to support our forest industry and the people employed in that industry.

Therefore, the Hon. Member's question is not worthy of comment except to say that he ought to pay more attention. Perhaps, as he spends more time in the House, he will sense the tone of Parliament and that on occasion Parliament can be a place where we can work together in mutual recognition that Canada's interests are at stake, and that we ought to make our best effort as parliamentarians to defend Canadian industry and Canadian employees in their time of need.