

Oral Questions

and which could effect thousands of more jobs being lost in Canada?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I responded in reply to the Hon. Member for Saint-Henri—Westmount that the question of the softwood lumber countervail action is part of a legal process which has already been started. That matter is under way. What I went on to say is that we recognize the importance of these bilateral issues and the effect they can have on the ongoing trade negotiations. So it is important that we try to find ways of managing these bilateral disputes.

ROLE OF PROVINCES

Mr. Raymond Garneau (Laval-des-Rapides): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Acting Prime Minister. It concerns free trade. In early February, Premier Getty, representing the provincial Premiers, sent to the Prime Minister an eight point proposal concerning the provinces' role in the free trade talks. As of last night, just three business days before the federal-provincial conference on free trade is to begin, the provinces have received no official reply.

Why has the Government not responded to the provinces? Even if the Government responds today, only 48 business hours before the conference, the provinces will not have time to respond appropriately. Is this an example of the Government's commitment to full participation of the provinces in the free trade talks.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. This is a little long.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, let me set out the degree of discussion which has taken place between the Government and the provinces during this period of time. Since the Halifax meeting there have been five very, very productive meetings of the ongoing committee of officials chaired by Ambassador Reisman. In addition to that, in response to the letter Premier Getty sent to the Prime Minister on how the provinces might participate in the trade discussions, the Secretary of State for External Affairs has met or talked to most of the Premiers in order to continue the dialogue on a political basis.

Since then the Prime Minister has called the Premiers together, and the purpose of the meeting on Monday night is to discuss this matter further. That is considerable consultation with the provinces.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Garneau: Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that the provincial premiers still do not know the federal Government's position.

INQUIRY WHETHER PRIME MINISTER COMMUNICATED WITH UNITED STATES PRESIDENT TO STOP TAX ON LUMBER PRODUCTS

Mr. Raymond Garneau (Laval-des-Rapides): My supplementary also concerns the meeting of First Ministers. We know that the U.S. Government is receiving a petition.

Did the Canadian Government, did the Prime Minister get in touch with the President of the United States to try and stop this levy of \$57 per 1,000 board feet, which amounts to a 27 per cent tariff on our lumber exports to the United States? Did the Prime Minister discuss this with the President of the United States?

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I will allow the answer in this case, but I would ask Hon. Members when asking supplementary questions at least to help the Chair figure out how they are clearly supplementary. I will allow the answer in this case.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, in response to the preamble to the Hon. Member's question, the whole purpose of the meeting on Monday is to discuss the participation of the provinces in the trade discussions. Surely the Hon. Member understands that it is necessary for the Prime Minister and the Premiers to get together to discuss that matter.

The second point of the Hon. Member's question was the same question which his seatmate asked a few minutes ago. Surely they can get together and get an answer.

Mr. Rossi: You never gave an answer.

● (1430)

JOB LOSSES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of State for Forestry who may at least give us some facts with respect to this industry. Yesterday shake and shingle producers told us that almost 4,000 jobs will disappear in British Columbia, while the American Ambassador claimed that most of these jobs will survive. Whom does the Minister believe, Mr. Niles or our producers?

Hon. Gerald S. Merrithew (Minister of State (Forestry)): Mr. Speaker, Ambassador Niles certainly has a right to his own opinion. He is expressing a view on behalf of his Government. He is trying to rationalize the decision taken by his own administration. Personally, I have some difficulty with it. The Government of Canada, and certainly the British Columbia Government as well as the people in British Columbia who are adversely affected by it, do not treat it very lightly.