

[Translation]

INQUIRY WHY PRIME MINISTER DID NOT SEIZE OPPORTUNITY
TO DEFEND CANADIAN INTERESTS

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (Saint-Henri—Westmount): Mr. Speaker, the Secretary of State for External Affairs has failed to answer the first question my colleague directed to him. My colleague wanted to know why, in his letter dated June 2 to the President of the United States, he had not raised neither the issue of the softwood lumber, nor that of the lost jobs in Canada. Why, then, did not the Prime Minister seize this opportunity to defend the interests of Canadian workers instead of merely patching up, so to speak, his personal relations with the President of United States?

The Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is right. I had forgotten the first part of the question directed to me by the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry, something for which I apologize. The answer is as follows: We are faced here with a quasi-judiciary system in the United States. Under the American legislation, it is impossible for the President of the United States to get involved in this process. That is why we have not made representations at the political level through the Prime Minister concerning a situation about which the President of the United States is not allowed to intervene.

• (1120)

[English]

TEXT OF PRIME MINISTER'S LETTER

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (Saint-Henri—Westmount): Mr. Speaker, of course we know that the Secretary of Commerce could have rejected the petition.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): He had the discretion; he could have said no.

Mr. Johnston: Beyond that I would like to know two things. First, did the Secretary of State for External Affairs approve the text of the obsequious June 2 letter? Second, does the Minister agree with us that it was singularly inappropriate and more concerned with refurbishing the personal relationship between the Prime Minister and the President of the United States rather than protecting the interests of Canadians?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the letter was better written than some books I have read.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Riis: Make a joke of it, Joe.

Mr. Rodriguez: Up yours, Joe.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): As I understood it, the particular question had to do with why the Prime Minister did not make

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a specific representation, a political representation, to a President who is prevented, precluded, by his country's law from intervening in this kind of case.

Mr. Broadbent: Do you approve of the letter?

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): That action was taken because the President is precluded from intervening in this kind of case. The Government of Canada has followed, to the limit, all of the options that were open to us. We made very clear the concern of the Government of Canada. We made the legal case.

Mr. Johnston: Did you approve the letter though?

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): We made the diplomatic representations. We went to the unusual lengths of having the Ambassador of Canada go into—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Hon. Member for Oshawa.

CONTENT OF PRIME MINISTER'S LETTER

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Minister has just given his whole argument away when he tried to contend a minute ago that it was a judicial process and therefore the Prime Minister should not intervene. He knows that up to 2 per cent of these decisions had been turned down before by the Secretary of Commerce. He knows that our own Ambassador has made an appeal within the last 48 hours. My question to the Minister is this. In this incredibly self-serving letter written by our Prime Minister to the President of the United States four days before the decision was made, why does the Prime Minister complain about personal injury to himself instead of going to bat for the 300,000 Canadian workers in this industry?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am sure it is not deliberate, but the Hon. Member is misstating the facts with regard to the countervail process in the United States. It is true that a very small percentage—I think the Hon. Member said 2 per cent—have been set aside. They are set aside on legal grounds. It is a quasi-judicial proceeding. Canada made our legal case through the appropriate officers. We took the extra step of sending the Ambassador in, who is, as the Hon. Member will know, a very skilled international lawyer as well as being our Ambassador, to make that case again. That was the limit of what it was possible for us to do under the system.

We also took the opportunity, on several occasions and in general terms which are allowable under these procedures, and which would not backfire on Canada, to express our political concern. We have done what the system allowed us to do.