

● (1220)

Mr. Langdon: I wish the Minister had not stuck to his text so closely this morning, and instead had taken some of the signals that came from both opposition parties, that we were quite interested in looking at some of the new rhetoric and the new commitments that came out this weekend. If that had been done I think there could have been a constructive step forward in this debate.

With respect to clean launch, I just cannot resist saying, the evidence builds up from every quarter. It started with the wholesale shift of the lumber senators themselves. It now comes out with statements by senior staff to senators which are relatively important in the senatorial makeup. If they are prepared to come out and specifically talk about the clear deal which they saw made, I for one see that as one more piece of evidence that I am not prepared to ignore.

My questions, however, are the following. First, the point which to this stage has never been made to the Minister, and I think it has to be made to him, is that as soon as we were into—the Minister and I have talked about this—a petition from the U.S. lumber producers we had to know that our chances of success were much less than if we could solve the problems by direct talks. Now the Minister took us through, I believe, five occasions of direct talks. I have to ask him, why did those talks fail? Why was this Government not able to obtain some kind of arrangement with respect to this sector that is so crucial to us? It was the failure of those talks which led to this petition. The petition has, as he said, taken its quasi-judicial route on to what I fear will be disaster for us in the end.

My second question is, the Secretary of State for External Affairs stated very clearly last night on CTV *Question Period*, in talking about the employment support Act, "I can't say we'll move on it this week, but that's certainly something that we're intending to move on". There were no ifs, there were no buts. Yet the Minister this morning has said if we decide to proceed we may do this or we may do that. I want the Minister to give us a clear answer. Are we, in fact, to now expect from this Government a commitment to use this Act to support the shake and shingle workers in B. C.? I think at least that much is owed them in face of the ineptitude of previous government policy with respect to the wood sector.

Mr. Kelleher: Mr. Speaker, in reply to the first question posed by the Hon. Member, it is quite correct, we did have discussions with the Americans attempting to head off the filing of a petition by the lumber industry. I believe that we met five times, in the months of January to May, inclusive. The stumbling block in those discussions was the American insistence that we must change our stumpage system, that it did not coincide with theirs, that it was not the same as theirs, and that the rates contained or derived from the stumpage system that we use in Canada is different and lower than that used in the States. Because it was lower, that in effect

Supply

constituted a subsidy. We could not agree to that. In 1983 we fought the countervail case on the existence of our stumpage system. It has not changed since then; it was good then and it is good now. We did not see anything wrong with it. That is why those talks failed, because we were not prepared to change our stumpage system.

With respect to his second question about which Act we were going to operate under, we have given our pledge that we are going to assist the industry. There is no doubt in our mind whatsoever about that, nor should there be in yours. All we have said is that we are trying to determine the best way to assist that industry. It may be that the best way is under that Act. We may also find other ways to assist the industry that may be better. Whatever it is, we are going to assist them; I can give you that unequivocal assurance.

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here to participate in this debate. Let me remind Members what the debate is all about. It is a motion that condemns the Government for the lack of care and concern for the workers in the cedar shakes and shingles industry and in the softwood lumber industry shown by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in his letter to President Reagan.

In the Prime Minister's "Dear Ron" letter to President Reagan he calls the cedar shakes and shingles industry and the 4,000 workers employed in that industry an incident. That is the only reference he makes to them. He sums them up by saying, "This incident will not alter our personal relationship". The 4,000 employees in the industry in British Columbia have been defined finally by this Government in the context of its priorities as a mere incident that should not get in the way of the personal relationship between the Prime Minister and the President.

What does he say about the softwood lumber industry? How does he define them? What word did he pull out of Webster's as he pored over it before his desk, the same book where he finds such words as "voracity", a word he obviously has not found the meaning of yet, nevertheless uses quite frequently. What word did he find for the softwood lumber industries and the workers? No word at all. There is not a single reference in this letter written to the President of the United States a few days before the Americans decide to proceed with the petition on softwood lumber—not a single word, not an utterance, not even a clearing of the throat about the softwood lumber industry.

One has to feel not only great compassion today and empathy for the cedar shakes and shingles worker, and not only compassion and empathy for the great uncertainty that has gripped all of those associated with the softwood lumber industry, one has to feel compassion and empathy for the Minister for International Trade (Mr. Kelleher). He is almost more to be pitied than to be blamed.