

*Customs Tariff*

No. We are spending a great deal of time debating whether or not we should have a 12 per cent or an 8 per cent tariff on hearing aids.

This debate is taking place while we face a crisis in the fishing industry, one looming in agriculture, some serious concerns with respect to mining and while a major emergency meeting was held over the weekend in Washington of Finance Ministers from the major western countries, including Japan. That meeting was called in order to reach agreement with the United States concerning devaluation of the American currency. However, Canada was not invited to the meeting, even though we are the country which will be most adversely affected by the decisions made there. It is really a slap in the face to this Government. It is like saying: "We are going to carry on these discussions over the weekend and there is no need to invite our little country cousin up in Canada to attend." What that says is that our Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) is considered to be the equivalent of a State Governor. State Governors are not invited to meetings of Ministers of Finance. Thus, Canada is not invited to participate in such an event. After all, it will only profoundly influence every region of the country. It will result in significant job reduction and place a number of jobs at risk, or at least have that potential.

What does the Government say in response? The Minister of State for Finance (Mrs. McDougall) stood in her place and said that it is of no consequence. She said that we are down there having discussions and, presumably, we have faith in Mr. Reagan. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lanthier), and I recognize him as an honourable parliamentarian, has said that this is a technical Bill with which we have to deal. Indeed, he is correct, it is a technical Bill. We wish to go through it clause by clause to determine whether or not the changes contained therein reflect the new trade policy of the Government. After all, Canada is a major trading partner in the world. Our livelihood depends upon the openness of our markets for others to accept our goods and services. We are a country taking massive steps day by day to expand our trading possibilities and opportunities. Now, the Government has come in and said: "Listen, we have a great idea. Let us cut back on all our customs officers. Let us cut back by more than 10 per cent all those people who deal with trade." I ask Hon. Members to think of that for just one second. There is some logic which begins to escape one.

We are a major trading partner and we want to expand and facilitate further trade. Yet, we are cutting back significantly with respect to the number of customs officers. Those are the people who are in the front lines. They are in the trenches with respect to the interface of trade with other countries. As representatives of the Customs offices of this country have indicated, what this means is that there will be an increase in contraband and smuggled materials coming into the country. There will be an increase in drugs and pornographic material coming into the country. However, the Government says: "Oh shucks, we have got a way to deal with that. We are going to have an honour system. We will just send the packages to

people and then they will pay the duty which is due on them." If you were a criminal, Mr. Speaker, and you were importing contraband, illegal bullion or pornographic materials and someone said: "We are now going to ask you folks to act on the honour system.", boy, that would be the best news that you would have heard for a long time. Yet, that is what the Government says we will do. We will act just as book clubs act. The book clubs send out their books and if the person who receives them likes them then he sends the price of the books back to the book club. This is a book club approach to smuggling and the importation of questionable materials.

As a Member of Parliament from western Canada, specifically from the Province of British Columbia, we in that province are looking forward to a national event next year which will bring in literally hundreds of thousands—no, millions—of visitors to western Canada. It is called Expo 86.

● (1610)

Expo 86 is a transportation exhibition. It is a world fair. Its intention is to introduce Canada to the world with one spin-off being enhanced trade. We know that so many more people will be visiting, yet we are going to deal with this by cutting back on customs positions at our borders and in our Customs offices across the country. I have met with a number of Customs officers in western Canada over the last few days. They were concerned when they learned they were going to receive major job position cut-backs. Their reaction was one of alarm. These people are proud of the jobs they do and the services they offer, for example, at the interior Customs ports where tourists and goods arrive for distribution to central British Columbia and other parts of western Canada. These people want to do a good job, Mr. Speaker, but they simply do not have adequate manpower to do what should be done in an attempt to increase the number of visitors to Canada and the number of imports and exports. They do not have enough person power to do the job. When they learned that they were now going to have further cut-backs it really frustrated these public servants because now, more than ever, they will be unable to do the kind of job they wish.

As my colleague, the Hon. Member for Regina East (Mr. de Jong) indicated, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about tariffs in this House, we are really talking about the regional development of Canada and how the tariff system either aids or abets that development. There is a perception, particularly in the western regions of Canada that customs and tariffs and so on are by and large designed to protect central Canadian industry and that as a result of those protective walls around the central Canadian industry, goods are priced more expensively than they ought to be. Those areas of the far east, west and north of Canada which are resource exporters have as the very basis of their economic development the fact of free trade. When one considers that one of the areas in which we have free trade today is the softwoods industry, and when we see what is happening in terms of the non-tariff barriers which are being erected in the United States, and now the threat of a quota being placed on our wood exports to the United States, we realize just how serious this whole matter can be. I really have