

S.O. 29

Canada is an exporting nation. With the renewed commitment to an enhanced trade agreement with our neighbours to the south, this has become even more predominant and important. Atlantic Canadians look forward with enthusiasm to the opportunities that enhanced trade would provide us as a natural north-south trading partner. Our geographic proximity to the New England states with its vast market of 48 million people was and continues to be of tremendously exciting potential. Obviously our natural forest products upon which we are so dependent would play a major role in that trade.

In the over-all context, it was not a tremendous amount of acreage that was affected. It probably amounts to something like less than 4 per cent of the acreage in New Brunswick and significantly less than that throughout the Atlantic provinces. Nevertheless, we must recognize that any imbalance in the delicate economic situation that exists in Atlantic Canada and the individual Atlantic provinces will have a devastating affect on the lives of the people. After all, we as a Government are concerned about the welfare and livelihoods of the people we represent.

I would suggest that those of us who have not had an opportunity to visit those areas cannot begin to imagine the devastation that exists. I had the opportunity to visit there. I live in proximity to one of the major fires in the Camp Gagetown area, something about which I will speak in a few moments. It really shocks the soul, to say the least, to drive through an area that the week before was a beautiful, green area with marvellous foliage, and see it turned into something reminiscent of Dante's Inferno. It is so very shocking to see.

In the few brief moments I have, I would like to show how integral the forest industry in Atlantic Canada can be to the economy of the nation as a whole. As I have stated, and it is important that we recognize the significance of this to Atlantic Canadians, Canada's forest industry across the nation from the Pacific to the Atlantic is a multimillion-dollar concern. It is the single largest industry in New Brunswick and is obviously essential to the economies of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec, northern Ontario and the northern parts of the prairie provinces.

The forestry sector is the single largest employer in Canada. It employs 450,000 employees directly and indirectly with annual wages and salaries that total in excess of some \$10 billion. It is our biggest foreign exchange earner. A serious setback such as the one we have experienced in Atlantic Canada will be very difficult for us as a nation and a Government to address. It provides unimagined setbacks to our economic renewal. The dollar value of this setback is, at this particular stage, very difficult to calculate, but the one thing of which we are sure is that the economic impact will be significant.

The New Brunswick forest industry accounts for some 16,000 jobs directly and another 20,000 jobs indirectly. As I have mentioned, that is equal to one in seven jobs in the Province of New Brunswick. The industry is worth in excess of \$1 billion to the province.

I feel that the losses we have incurred should be brought into perspective with reference to the recognition of how long it takes a forest to grow. I mentioned two major forest fires which occurred previously. One of the tragedies of this situation is that the forests that were devastated in 1934 and 1944 were just about to come into production. Part of those lands have again been burned.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the very substantial efforts of the thousands of people and the volunteer fire departments across Atlantic Canada which have assisted in extinguishing these blazes. They have risked their lives this past weekend. In New Brunswick alone, hundreds of people reacted to this very serious and risky situation without thought to their own personal safety in order to save homes, property and, no doubt, even lives.

As I mentioned before, I have been there. I have seen it; I was in the middle of it. I was in a community where an evacuation order had been put in place. In the Gagetown area from where I come, it has been recognized by the military that that particular fire started as a result of live shelling. This afternoon I called upon the Government to accept its responsibility and ensure that the residents of that area, some of whom lost homes or hundreds of acres of woodland, are adequately and fairly compensated.

I appreciated the response of the Associate Minister of Defence (Mr. Andre), although I was somewhat concerned by his remarks to the effect that: "if the Government accepts responsibility for that". There has been a statement by Department of National Defence personnel indicating that indeed the military was responsible for starting those fires. How this will be addressed over the coming days and weeks remains to be seen. However, I hope that the Government will act with compassion and respond positively to the concerns of these people due to the utter devastation they are personally experiencing.

Again, I reiterate that this situation is a very difficult thing for us to imagine. If it were not for the volunteer fire departments, 18 of which came from my constituency and surrounding areas, which responded to that fire in the Gagetown region, it is difficult to imagine the sort of destruction and havoc that would have been wreaked upon the area. When I drove through the area I saw an A-frame house in the middle of the woods, obviously placed there because of the solitude and tranquility of its location, and this house was not touched or scorched by the fire. However, all around it charred trees stood *en masse*. There are several examples of that sort of thing. It was only due to the heroic efforts of volunteer fire departments that that real property was saved. Unfortunately, that has changed an entire way of life.

I am sure that tonight some people are sitting in their homes amid charred exteriors thinking that they probably would have been a whole lot better off if their homes had gone up in flames to begin with. It is a fact of life, however, that people are prepared to accept what happened. They now expect that