

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear that because I am sure the Prime Minister knows there are no workers in this country who are not scared to death they are going to lose their jobs.

There are many things that can be done. The Prime Minister will agree that there are millions of Canadians without jobs and, alas, too many without hope. Today, the decision by the International Joint Commission on softwood lumber came as a blow to that industry. The Ministry for International Trade did answer, of course, that this is one in a series of stages. However, I think it is very important that the Prime Minister himself give direction that Canada take strong action now, before it is too late. Will the Prime Minister use his resources, his power and his influence to fight this unfair softwood lumber decision that we had today.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I will put the resources, the talents and the influence that the hon. member imputes to me in a very vigorous defence of softwood lumber. I know she only said that because it is Christmas.

I would hope that the results for Canada, given the mechanisms that we negotiated in the free trade agreement, will be as beneficial as those in the recent pork decision which brought so much benefit to Canadian farmers.

My hon. friend asked me whether I am open to new specific suggestions to improve the economy. Indeed, I am, and perhaps she might tell me specifically what she has in mind to improve the economy.

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• (1440)

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Mark Assad (Gatineau—La Lièvre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. Is the minister willing, with the consent of the House, to propose today a motion to show Canadian farmers his commitment to maintain farm assistance programs as we know them today, and to advise all GATT members of our determination to keep our farm programs?

[English]

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the determination of the Government of Canada, the producers and the provinces has been shown to the world.

An hon. member: Oh, oh.

Mr. McKnight: I am not too sure who is muttering over there in the backbenches.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. McKnight: I would say to the hon. member that the Government of Canada, the producers and the provinces have shown their commitment to maintaining supply management in Canada. The hon. Minister of Agriculture for the province of Ontario led a delegation to Geneva along with farm leaders to express their point of view in support of the Government of Canada's negotiating position.

At the present time the Government of British Columbia is leading a delegation to Geneva, made up of farm leaders, to say that they support the Government of Canada's position. The Government of Quebec has been in Geneva supporting the Government of Canada's position.

I think the hon. member and all members of this House support the government's position in its negotiations.

Mr. Mark Assad (Gatineau—La Lièvre): Mr. Speaker, my question was clear and direct. The farmers are expecting an unconditional response. We are asking for a simple motion to show unconditional support for the farmers of this country, as other legislatures in this country did. Why can the minister not present a motion and give the response to the rest of the countries in the GATT that we are determined to support our farmers?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, it is very strange to hear that coming from the Liberal benches after the farmers throughout Canada, who from 1980 to 1984 had their income decimated, were paying 22 and 24 per cent interest rates, had inflation at 14 per cent, and not one dollar of assistance to agriculture by the former Liberal government during all those difficult times.