

Softwood Lumber Products Export Charge Act

Mr. Champagne (Champlain): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The Hon. Member for Champlain (Mr. Champagne) on a point of order.

Mr. Champagne (Champlain): Madam Speaker, I very rarely rise on a point of order. However, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) has said that Quebec has not given its agreement. I believe that he is misleading the House because I have here a press release from Minister Pierre MacDonald, who says, and I quote: "Without the negotiations with the United States, we would certainly not have been able to launch our reforestation and forest management program . . . We would not have been able to do so if we had opted for another solution."

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Order! The Hon. Member for Champlain (Mr. Champagne) may have the opportunity to rise again. In my opinion, this was not a point of order but a point for debate, and I think that he himself was entering into a debate in an attempt to explain the point of order. The Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) has the floor.

Mr. Gauthier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Beside, the Hon. Member has already spoken to this amendment. Like all his colleagues from Quebec—and there are not many of them to have addressed this issue—he did what he could to show it from a biased point of view.

Madam Speaker, I know that my time is running out, but I wish to conclude by saying that the provinces, whether they like it or not, have been had by the Federal Government. They have been taken for a ride simply because some of their rights have been sold out without previous consultation and without a proper mechanism. It's a shame, Madam Speaker, and I blame this Government for acting in such a despicable and stupid manner.

Mr. Blais: This is not true!

An Hon. Member: This is Liberal arrogance at its best!

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The Hon. Member for Scarborough West (Mr. Stackhouse) has the floor.

● (1530)

[English]

Mr. Reginald Stackhouse (Scarborough West): Madam Speaker, like my hon. friend, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) for whom I have great regard, the export of softwood lumber is not a major economic item in our area. Nonetheless, I enter this debate through concern over one of the ramifications of the discussion thus far in the House and in the media, namely the extent to which Bill C-37 threatens Canadian sovereignty. I would like to share with you, Madam Speaker, and with Members of the House some thoughts about the way in which this Bill and this debate

relate to Canadian sovereignty in so far as the intent of this Bill is designed to strengthen confederation and be understood in the most enhanced way.

To support that, I go back to an article I read many years ago as a university student by the great Canadian historian, Frank Underhill. He is often quoted on the opposite side of the House with respect, but Members on the opposite side have been so busy quoting Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir Robert Borden that they must have forgotten their old guru. Frank Underhill argued that the character of confederation was such that most of its benefits had accrued to the capitalist class of both Toronto and Montreal and that confederation had been designed to satisfy not so much political aspirations but economic ambitions.

One of the things that we are attempting to do in this Parliament through the policies of our Government is to define confederation in a way that gives an equal sense of justice, participation and caring to all regions of Canada. I would hope that many of us living in central Canada are sensitive historically as well as contemporaneously to the priority of Canadian sovereignty and that the need to stress our identity would take into account the need to recognize the economic hopes and priorities of all the regions, many of which have not enjoyed the prosperity that would be their wish and ours, one of these regions being British Columbia and other lumber producing provinces.

As I see it, Bill C-37 attempts to do that because it is designed to maintain the health and integrity of the lumber industry in that area and across the country. One illustration is the way in which the revenues to be derived from the new tax will be distributed to the provinces. The provincial Governments can gain. This is a recognition both of our commitment to maintain the health and strength of the lumber industry in other parts of the country and to recognize the legitimate aspirations of the provincial Governments throughout this land.

I would argue, Madam Speaker, that rather than being a threat to sovereignty, this Bill actually contributes positively to it because it is contributing to the ongoing strength of this confederation. We have to recognize that confederation has a future only if there is an accompanying economic strength. I have a second point to emphasize in this debate. I would like to emphasize the way in which Bill C-37 will add to the economic prosperity this country has been enjoying in the last two years. It will increase the economic strength of a province that has been hit hard.

● (1540)

First, the Bill will allow the lumber export industry in British Columbia and elsewhere to continue to be viable. For that reason, what is contained in a letter from an official of the International Woodworkers of America is not surprising. This is the kind of official that is not always quoted on this side of the House, but I am very happy to do so today. The letter reads: