

*Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*

[English]

Where is the biggest and the closest market for those products? South of the border, Mr. Speaker, that is where it is. The workers of Hâvre St-Pierre know that, and that is why they strongly supported us on November 21.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, my constituents who are employed in the pulp and paper and forest industries all voted for free trade. They saw in this Agreement new opportunities. The pulp manufactured in Port-Cartier is used to make products for hygienic and medical purposes. The Free Trade Agreement will open wide the doors to the American market by eliminating tariffs on these products. These tariff reductions will make our products more competitive, thereby consolidating the jobs for the Cascades plant workers in Port-Cartier, as well as forest workers in my riding.

Mr. Speaker, the Free Trade Agreement will also benefit the fishing industry which is very important in my riding. The fishermen, the operator and workers of the fish processing plants see new opportunities in the Free Trade Agreement. They are already considering setting up new processing units for highly specialized products in the area of preserving, vacuum packaging and deep freezing fish ready for retail store shelves. I understood the concern expressed by the fishermen in my riding when I heard the half-truth spread by the Opposition parties about the impact of the Free Trade Agreement on the fishing industry. But the fishermen have come to realize that the Agreement is not a threat for their industry, but that it will increase its growth potential.

Mr. Speaker, they know that their industry is world class, Canada being the greatest exporter of fish and fish base products in the world. They also know that the United States absorb in full 60 per cent of our fish exports.

The Canadian fishing industry employs more than 120,000 people and plays a key role in the economies of our coastal provinces, of certain areas of Quebec, of Northern communities and of the coastal communities of Manicouagan.

In the Atlantic provinces and Quebec, for example, approximately half of the 1,300 fishing communities rely exclusively on the fishing industry. In the Northwest Territories, communities have come to rely almost exclusively on commercial fishing. That is the case, Mr.

Speaker, in the area of my riding which lies between Kégaska and Blanc-Sablon.

There is no doubt that the Free Trade Agreement will benefit the Canadian fishing industry and that it will have a beneficial impact on communities which depend on this industry's prosperity.

Through the Free Trade Agreement, Canada and the United States have agreed to phase out over a 10-year period the tariffs which presently apply to fish products, thus giving Canada a considerable advantage over its major competitors. As customs tariffs are phased out, Canadian processing industries will be able to increase their production of finished products. We will then no longer export only raw or semi-processed fish, since we will be able to produce finished products at competitive prices, thus creating jobs.

Consequently, many regions in this country will be able to fully develop their natural resources. Product diversification and processing activities give rise to new jobs and create a strong economic base for the many fishing communities which are presently in a vulnerable situation.

The Free Trade Agreement will increase the value added to products by processes such as canning and preparation of ready-to-eat foods. Since the market for processed foods is growing rapidly, this sector represents new potential for growth and job creation that will result from the expected increase in exports of these products.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition has tried many times to make our fishermen believe that many of our social programs like unemployment insurance will be affected by this Agreement. The Free Trade Agreement has absolutely no effect on social programs in Canada.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, even the Americans recognize that social programs cannot be subject to countervailing duties and when they tried to take such action against the unemployment insurance program, from which most fishermen benefit, their own trade tribunal threw the case out.

These social programs were never on the negotiating table and never will be in the future. Canadians attach as much importance to universal programs as our Government does.

[English]

The Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Mulroney) has been very firm concerning our social programs during the negotiations. He has on several occasions made the commitment that Canada will never sign an agreement