

Softwood Lumber

circulated by the American organization asking for a countervailing duty on softwood lumber.

If 65 American senators are just bureaucrats, I wonder what kind of political image the government of Canada and its Prime Minister have of the United States, our trading partner. Based on all the information that we had, the American government had agreed that the countervailing duty be imposed province by province. It had even decided what that rate would be. For the government of Quebec, the province of Quebec, the sawmills of Quebec, the sawmills in my constituency, the sawmill Paul Vallée Inc., the sawmill A.D. Bernier, the sawmill Beau Chêne, which all employ some 50 people, it was 3.78 per cent.

The difference between 3.78 per cent and 14.48 per cent means survival for our sawmills. That is the way it is in the constituency of Témiscouata and Bellechasse. The Minister says: From now on, we will act.

An hon. member: It is a bit late.

Mr. Gérin: Where I come from we would use terms that are very close to the word "stupid".

Mr. Speaker, the government of Quebec was not consulted. It complains that it was not consulted and it had an agreement with the Canadian government. So I ask you who is to blame?

The problem for sawmills in Quebec is not the same one as for sawmills in British Columbia and it must not be treated in the same fashion. Gordon Ritchie was the Canadian negotiator for the agreement, among others, on softwood lumber and the GATT. When asked by officials of the Quebec Association: "If there is a countervailing duty, will it be at least a duty imposed by province rather than a national tariff?", Mr. Ritchie replied: "It will be a national tariff because the unity of the country is at stake." Well, Mr. Speaker, national unity just cost 55 jobs at Paul Vallée Inc.. National unity also cost 50 jobs at Beau Chêne and it will soon cost a hundred jobs or so at A.D. Bernier. That situation is not

unique to my constituency and I might add that there are 75 constituencies in Quebec.

Mr. Speaker, is it worth it in the name of national unity, for something that could have been done differently, to waste so many jobs and to affect regional development so much? I tell you that it is not worth it. Mr. Wilson claims that Canada is too small to do normal business with the United States. I tell him that Quebec would have been able to do a lot better.

I will conclude by urging the minister to immediately tell Americans that Quebec has jurisdiction over its forests, that Quebec is capable of negotiating an agreement for its own province, that Quebec agrees with the 3.8 per cent rate, and to immediately restore the exemptions for those who import their lumber from the United States to give it an added value in Canada and then export it back to the United States. I am talking about the sawmills from the eastern townships and the Beauce region that are close to the border. I realize that my time is up.

Mr. Yvon Côté (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues who have already spoken, I believe we all share the same indignation, the same disappointment over the event which many consider very serious. According to them, this issue originates from Mr. Bush or, at least, certain of his supporters. So I share this indignation with all my colleagues. In a free trade agreement, where there is a partnership, where the exchange should be fair, it is inconceivable that one partner would take advantage of the other, often in an all too obvious manner.

To all my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, to the government, to the Prime Minister and to those who have spoken before me, I express my disappointment and my indignation.

I must say, however, to clarify the circumstances, that this decision was taken in a particular context. I can imagine, as is the case in some businesses, that you have shareholders who have a more or less twisted way of thinking, who have hidden, circumstantial, or electoral interests, and who have, momentarily maybe, goals which are not those of their companies, but their own. And I understand that in certain political circumstances, one can suspect, since there is a lot going on in the