

Softwood Lumber Products Export Charge Act

Some have tried, as members of the Opposition are doing it now, to draw a red herring by claiming that Canada's sovereignty had been eroded.

Mr. Prud'homme: You bet!

Mr. Ferland: Well, I may not entirely agree, and I would like to quote what Mr. Pierre MacDonald said at a press conference in Quebec City, and God knows how much Quebecers value the concept of sovereignty. This might not be true for the Liberals at the time, though.

On the matter of sovereignty, this is what Mr. MacDonald said, and I quote: "I would like to draw a parallel on one aspect of the differences mentioned by Miss Carney which is sometimes misunderstood. We are talking about supervision. Any shareholder of a business receives a financial statement every year. He can examine that statement, he can examine the developments in the light of the system which would have been implemented if the countervailing decision had been taken. The United States could have sent us a team of internal auditors on a regular basis. It is quite another possibility for us to produce our own statistics which would then be made available to all interested parties. If the Americans want to examine those figures, let them do it. But no team of internal auditors will come and browse in our Department of Forestry".

I think that is quite clear.

The Hon. Member for Westmorland Kent (Mr. Robichaud) said that to be on good terms with your neighbours, you should have a fence. We should not forget, however, how this debate on forestry came about and how we were led in Canada to take these decisions and to introduce Bill C-37 in the House.

Let us not forget that in the 70s, the percentage of Canadian lumber on the American market was in the order of 25 per cent. That is something that few Members mentioned in the House. Yet, through the efficient efforts of Canadians and the Canadian industry, I should say through its aggressive policies on international markets, we have been able to control, by the 1980s, at this very moment, some 33 per cent of the US lumber market.

I also remember hearing people in the forest industry say a few months ago: Maybe we should tone down our aggressive policies on the US market. We might shake them awake. Well, we did wake them up. And we got what we might somehow have expected. Of course, it is a good thing to have fences between good neighbours. You can have them as high as you want. But when your neighbour trespasses a little too much or too often on your property you tell him: Listen, Joe, why don't you move back on your side a little? You are stepping on my toes. You are getting to be a nuisance. The Americans took that attitude, somehow. What did we do? We had several alternatives. We could have gone the Liberal way, that is let the Americans levy a 36 or 25 per cent tax which would have been collected by the American Treasury. How bright! Giving out Canadian money to the American Treasury.

There was another alternative which was to negotiate, to try to reach an agreement while protecting our American markets and try to save the greatest possible number of jobs in Canada. We had to find a compromise and that compromise was the 15 per cent tax.

This 15 per cent tax is not inconsistent with the position held by the Quebec Government since it had already decided to reconsider its forestry policy, according to Mr. MacDonald, well before the United States initiated any countervailing measure. I should say that the Federation of Lumber Producers is not so much against an increase if the Quebec Government decides that the 15 per cent tax will be used to reduce the price or the increased stumpage fees because some of those people thought the government was somehow in conflict with private industry or in competition with it. This will allow 120,000 producers... because it should not be forgotten that the Quebec Federation of Lumber Producers represent 120,000 owners of small private wooded lots, small businessmen. Those people will be in a position to develop their business, to have a place in the sun and open up some markets.

When the Opposition refers to sovereignty, I have to say that nothing in that Bill encroaches upon Canadian sovereignty.

Mr. Prud'homme: Come on!

Mr. Ferland: You can say what you like, gentlemen, the agreement was negotiated with the consent of the provinces. Of course... I see the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier). I am sure that he will not agree about that, because negotiating with the consent of the provinces was never the strong point of the Liberal Government to which he has belonged for years. This is quite sure. He could never understand that. We are doing this with the approval of the provinces, with the approval of the Quebec Government. And speaking of sovereignty in Quebec, all Quebec Premiers, from Mr. Duplessis through Mr. Bourassa who is there again, Mr. Lévesque and everyone else—

Mr. Prud'homme: Hydroelectric power.

Mr. Ferland: Never mind electric power. We are dealing with lumber here. Let us not mix the hare and the hound. That has always been the Liberal position, to try and confuse everyone when there is a very clear-cut and specific matter at hand.

Mr. Prud'homme: It is said that one's precedent can become another's precedent.

Mr. Ferland: Madam Speaker, it would be interesting for once if Liberal Members would listen instead of chattering, as they do all the time when we—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) on a point of order.