

*The Address*

The tourist industry is big in the riding of Matapédia—Matane. We have ski resorts with a skiing season longer than anywhere else east of the Rockies, and using only natural snow. Come and see us some time, come and ski with us, hon. members.

I could not fully describe the riding of Matapédia—Matane without mentioning its wildlife. Hunters and fishermen come from all over Canada, and from abroad to practice their favourite sport. Our salmon rivers, like the Matapédia and the Matane rivers, are renowned worldwide. All these sectors must be recognized as part of our regional economy.

Matapédia—Matane used to be an agricultural riding, but unfortunately agriculture is waning. There are fewer opportunities for the young generation since farms have become small and medium-sized businesses or large corporations. Fine, you say! Perhaps. However, it is far from easy to find people willing to assume such a heavy financial burden. The way things stand now, young people simply cannot respond to the challenge.

• (1400)

In the past, even though they worked hard, our ancestors knew very early that there would be someone to carry on. Nowadays, there is no one willing to carry on because the burden is much too heavy. So people auction off their farms. What a pity! Lands with high quality topsoil lay fallow and are invaded by weeds or spruce. Even well-established and hard-working farmers have enormous problems.

Both the GATT and NAFTA have given rise to many concerns! The removal of export quotas creates others, for those who unfortunately have to work endless hours over the years. While farmers in the past were a great source of pride to rural communities, they are now disappearing before our very eyes.

Instead of giving out millions of dollars worth of unemployment benefits in my riding and others within Quebec or Canada, is a responsible government not supposed to fight for and get globally a fair price, an equivalent value for our farm products? For years the Liberals and the Conservatives have had no consideration for the rights of small communities. Is this government going to keep neglecting those farmers? They start by overtaxing them, then they shut down their post offices and they deprive them of their means of communications by closing down television stations, and so on. I will ask for a new review of the case of Radio—Matane.

In my riding, there are some cattle farms. Yet, no slaughterhouse is to be found within 250 kilometers. Is this not unbelievable? So much for the village, so much for the city. Is the minister of Agriculture well acquainted with rural areas? Is he really concerned with the real problems? Villages such as Les Méchins, Saint-Charles-Garnier, Petite-Matane, Val-Brillant,

Saint-Damase, Saint-Noël, Sainte-Jeanne and Sainte-Érène are charming areas that have a right to survive and where people have the right to work. It is a matter of dignity. Yet, for more than 20 years, these small villages have had problems.

The question I am asking myself and my colleagues in this House is whether people in these small villages still have the right to live at home. As long as these rural people pay taxes to the federal government, I will fight for them. That is why they elected me. They are not getting their due. These men and women have spent their lives in forestry, fishing or farming; they spent all their energy to raise a family and now, at 55, tired, exhausted and even sick sometimes, they have no pension fund. Should they be considered as pariahs of our society? No, Madam Speaker!

I will plead for those men and women who have preserved true family values, values so important that 1994 will be the International Year of the Family. I will also fight for the young people, a human resource of great richness, for those young people who have to leave their region after high school or, in some cases, after college. Unfortunately, most of them never come back.

I ask all the members of the House to be more receptive, more understanding of the rural way of life. The same thing could happen to forestry in the near future. The former government had announced it was withdrawing from the subsidiary agreement with Quebec on forestry and from the forest development program in eastern Quebec.

• (1405)

The non-renewal of these two programs will affect more than 18,000 foresters in eastern Quebec. In the lower St. Lawrence region, more than 50 per cent of private woodlot owners take part in development whereas that figure is about 12 per cent for the province as a whole.

During the campaign, the Liberal Party acknowledged the positive impact of these programs and promised it would examine its financial contribution and bring it back to previous levels. I will personally see to it that they fulfill that commitment. The Minister of Natural Resources can count on my co-operation. These programs must be re-evaluated and she must consult all stakeholders. It is those involved in the area who can best advise her.

At a time when, on a global scale, there is so much talk of sustainable development and the protection of ecosystems I can assure this House that, in my riding, forestry workers are ready and eager to meet the challenge.

More than 20 years ago, pool management came to my riding. Two thousand producers are still on the waiting list to take part in this collective effort.