

Softwood Lumber Products Export Charge Act

At this point in the letter we find listed no fewer than seven separate items to which the United States would object under the terms of the agreement. They are: the rebate, remission, deferral or non-collection of the export charge, except as provided in the understanding; the provision of grants, low-cost loans and other benefits; exemption from obligations otherwise imposed by the Government of Canada and other governmental bodies in Canada; assumption of obligations currently borne by the producers or exporters of certain softwood lumber products; reduction in the price of stumpage or other charges on softwood timber harvested from provincial Crown lands; changes in log scaling or lumber measurement rules or procedures which affect volume determination; and awarding contracts for silviculture, road-building, recreational, and other foresting activities on a non-competitive basis. This is a bundle of constraints upon our industry that no Government should have ever contemplated.

Another part of this agreement which I think all would feel is something of questionable implication for Canada and something about which we should be truly concerned is the amazing 30-day opt-out clause. Essentially, what we have in the softwood lumber agreement is a commercial treaty. For the Government of Canada to enter into such a commercial treaty with the provision that the other side, with all the powers that are reserved to it and with all the actions which we have admitted that the United States can still take against Canadian industry, should then opt out at 30 days' notice is to me rather amazing. I might say it is rather appalling.

The implications of the lumber deal for Canadian sovereignty are obvious. Canada's Government has subjected not only the federal Government's actions but also provincial Governments' actions and the traditional negotiation and review of each other's actions by the provincial and federal Governments to the supervision of the United States Department of Commerce. I use these words advisedly because, after all, Canada will be providing the Americans with all sorts of statistics under the provisions of this agreement. So having submitted ourselves once to U.S. supervision in this softwood lumber agreement, what then is to stop the United States Trade Representative from demanding such supervision in any future free trade arrangements? It seems to me that what we have here in the softwood lumber agreement is something that runs completely counter—absolutely opposite—to the whole thrust and spirit of the free trade negotiations that the Government has so foolishly and firmly committed itself to undertake. Surely this point must be made: Is this not the first domino for Canada's trading relationship? Is this not the first block that has been taken out of the wall that must eventually collapse?

Some Hon. Members: No!

Mr. Parry: Is this not the first straw of which the last will indeed break the camel's back?

Some Hon. Members: No!

Mr. Parry: Madam Speaker, I hear cries of dissent from my Conservative colleagues in the House. But do I hear them defending this agreement? No, I do not. Are they telling me that this does not weaken Canada's position in the free trade negotiations? I certainly cannot believe they would make such a ludicrous proposition when we now have one of Canada's major industries on the block and when we know very well that it is the intention of the U.S. Trade Representative to put every other major Canadian industry on the block, or on the table as they say in these free trade negotiations.

With respect to the terms of the free trade negotiations, I keep hearing about the level playing-field. I cannot find a Conservative Member in the House who will tell me that this softwood lumber agreement represents part of the level playing-field concept. Everyone knows what happens on a level playing-field—the larger and heavier, numerically stronger team wins and generally rolls over the side that is smaller, weaker or less represented in terms of numbers. That is the meaning of a level playing-field for the people in Canada's forest industry and for the workers who will be affected by this agreement. It is an agreement in which the Government has not only unthinkingly legislated a whole range of disparities between the industry in the different provinces and different parts within provinces, but it has also put at risk very substantial sectors of Canada's forest economy.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Ferland (Portneuf): Madam Speaker, it is after considerable hesitation that I decided to take part today in the debate on softwood lumber. I was prompted to do so by the comments I heard before lunch from the Hon. Member for Bourassa (Mr. Rossi), who barely used up two or two and a half minutes of his time, only to rail against me. I would have liked him to go on with his comments after lunch, but he did not come back to the House. Should we conclude that he would rather indulge in politicking than attempt to find solutions to very serious problems?

I also heard the comments of the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier). Of course there are surely many forests and a great number of softwood producers in his riding.

The Hon. Member for Windsor-West (Mr. Gray) is also a great expert on forestry issues. The Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier told the House that UPA members were not in favor of the proposed agreement with the Americans, which is not quite true. He was probably misinformed, since I had the pleasure today, at noon hour, along with one of my colleagues, the Hon. Member for Argenteuil—Papineau (Mrs. Bourgeault), to meet with a number of presidents of the Quebec federation of lumber producers. These people are quite satisfied with the agreement concluded between the Americans and the Canadian government.