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of the most poignant. It is a case of representatives of the industry not knowing which way to turn. They know they are not viable the way they are. They do not understand why the government is willing to leave the export tax in place. They do not understand why the government has continued to push the dollar so high. There is a lack of confidence that there will be any out for this. At the same time the bankers and lending institutions are coming by to examine the books of these companies to see if the whole thing is viable.

When we get to the point of putting the question to the Minister for International Trade as to whether he is going to go to Washington and make a decision to abrogate this agreement or to negotiate out of it, it all turns to mush. There is just no decision to do that.

At the same time communities are crumbling. There are lay-offs that take place and people have to wait for six or seven weeks for their unemployment insurance benefits. They do not know how long this is going to take place.

It is the same for the laid-off workers at Algoma Steel in Sault Ste. Marie. They say: "Well, we are getting UI initially, at least, but we have no confidence in the future as to whether the industry is going to continue to operate". I think that is true throughout the north for the softwood lumber industry. Will the industry be there? Will the shut-down that is supposed to last for a couple of months last all summer, last all fall? They do not discern any commitment by the government to come to grips with the problem. They know that the companies are strapped. They have no borrowing power. Their line of credit is right up to the limit. So it is a directionless situation. Do they jump and try and get—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Order, please. The time for question and comments is over. Resuming debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Plourde (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup): Mr. Speaker, as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Sciences and Technology, I am pleased to rise on the motion introduced by the hon. member for Willowdale. I am happy to do so because we all know that Canada's economic competitiveness and future prosperity are an excellent discussion topic requiring the

involvement and the knowledge of every hon. member and every Canadian.

But most of all, I know that that debate will provide me and my colleagues with the opportunity to show how much we care for the Canadian competitiveness. In spite of all false contentions, Mr. Speaker, the government's commitment to make a strong and prosperous Canada during the 1990s and beyond is unprecedented.

Sciences and technology are crucial to increasing Canada's competitive edge and economic prosperity. Technological research and development are the great factors of growth in a world economy characterized by innovation and the spreading of knowledge.

The key to innovation is the skills and knowledge of our people. Benefits will accrue to men and women who will make the best of their knowledge and their skills to design, develop and create new or improved products, processes and services as well as to open up new markets.

• (1730)

Mr. Speaker, our government believes that Canada's prosperity is based on five pillars: access to international markets, effective management of our human resources, a better corporate financial situation, a corporate culture characterized by competitiveness, and a climate enabling us to benefit from science and technology.

In each of these sectors, Canada has a challenge to face. Most of these challenges are not exclusive to Canada. They are universal, created by rapidly changing international markets and an unprecedented pace in technological development.

We, as a government, are determined, to do what must be done to place Canada—that is, its industries, its scientific and research institutions, as well as all its citizens—in a position to transform these challenges into prospects for the future. We are doing so by using the best possible strategy. We have all learned the hard lessons of our predecessors' approach. They tried to fix everything with grants, but we have seen that such an approach leads nowhere.

We have followed a complete and judicious set of priorities, established to promote excellence in the field