

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

This means that as governments deregulate, privatize, and contract out services which are now provided by public servants in a not-for-profit arrangement, they will all become open to takeovers by the American corporations which have established immense financial power and expertise for the purpose of making profit out of people's health. In the United States there are corporations whose large business it is to manage hospitals. They boast that last year and the year before they eliminated 73,000 hospital worker jobs.

In case some naive person on the government side imagines that this is because Americans have become much healthier and do not need hospital care, I will point out that statistics show that many millions of Americans have no hospital care at all, that the time spent by the elderly in particular in these institutions is being reduced, and that the quality of health care in the United States is lower than the quality of health care in Canada, even though the total cost is higher. That is what the Americans get as a result of for-profit hospitals and other services. That is why they want to reduce it here.

Mr. McDermid: That is not allowed.

Mr. Heap: That is why the Parliamentary Secretary keeps on heckling even though he does not like it when we heckle his Minister. The fact is that when any of these institutions are contracted out or opened up for privatization, American firms, without establishing in Canada, according to the agreement, will immediately be able to underbid on those firms because they will be bidding to provide a poorer service at a lower price in order to increase their profits.

People who work at these hospitals, nursing homes, homes for the aged, and other institutions like that now provided as public service under public jurisdiction and control with responsible union relationships among their employees and responsible staffing will be replaced by for-profit groups which in the States, as I have said, have a much lower level of service. There will be wage cuts, staff cuts, service cuts, and profit increases.

If this were not in fact the case, the Government ought to be willing to amend this law in the way this amendment asks. It ought to be willing to renegotiate the agreement with the United States so as to exclude this possibility. It is clear that this amendment calls the Government's bluff and exposes its intention to open our health services to the profiteers from the United States.

● (2120)

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to see the Chairman of the Communications and Culture Committee sitting in the Chair. I hope you will transmit to the Minister and the Government the views that are not being presented by a partisan politician, or someone who thinks you have done very dastardly deeds with our communications and cultural policy.

I am going to read for the record the views of the Cultural Industries Alliance which says that the free trade agreement

undermines Canadian policy. Those organizations and institutions have the very important responsibility for promoting Canadian sovereignty and cultural industries and the responsibility to portray a view of ourselves so that, as the Minister would say, Canadians can see each other, appreciate and grow with each other. That will not happen as a result of the work the Minister undertook. I suggest that her remarks today were completely irrelevant.

I want to read a statement on the implications of the Canada-U.S. trade agreement for Canada's identity and cultural sovereignty. It was issued in July, 1988, and was prepared by the Cultural Industries Alliance composed of the following groups: Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists; Association des Producteurs de Film et Video du Québec; Association of Canadian Film and Television Producers; Association of Canada Film Craftspeople; Association of Canadian Publishers; Canadian Actors' Equity Association; Canadian Association of Motion Picture and Electronic Recording Artists; Canadian Conference of the Arts; Canadian Film and Television Association; Canadian Independent Record Production Association; Canadian Periodical Publishers Association; Directors Guild of Canada; National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians; Periodical Writers Association of Canada; and The Writers Union of Canada.

The Alliance states that publishers and writers have allied with actors and directors, as well as with film, television and record producers, to amplify their opposition to the treatment of culture in the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement. The singular importance of this issue has persuaded them that they must speak out together to voice their serious concern over the long term effects of the agreement. Each member of this alliance is convinced that the agreement's so-called exemption for culture will actually discourage Canadian Governments in future from taking measures to assist the development of independent cultural industries by Canadians for Canadian audiences.

They believe that nurturing of Canadian works, which reflect and inspire uniquely Canadian points of view, is essential to this country's growth as a sovereign nation. Owing to our small population, our geographic proximity to a major power, and the extraordinary dominance of imported cultural goods, Canadians have found it necessary to provide counter-balances by introducing policies and legislation that make it possible for Canadian voices to be heard in our own country. I would like them to read the Minister's remarks about Canadian voices.

They go on to state that measures that might be taken to ensure this growth, however, appear compromised by the agreement, and it is doubtful if measures introduced in the past would be acceptable were they to be proposed in the post free trade Canada; therefore, they say, we are forced to conclude that our sovereignty is jeopardized by the agreement.