

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the hon. member from Montreal says that Canada was short-changed in the negotiations with Mexico and the United States. That should come as a real surprise to the U.S. Congress. It is reluctant to endorse and sign the free trade agreement, and so are Ross Perot and the U.S. labour unions. They are saying publicly in the United States that Canada was so clever it obtained practically everything it wanted in these negotiations, and so did Mexico. We say that we got results that were good for us and for all three parties. So my friend should know that in the United States, the Americans are being accused of giving in too much to the Canadians and the Mexicans, which should be music to the ears of the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard.

[English]

Mr. Paul Martin (LaSalle—Émard): Madam Speaker, Mr. Perot was talking about Mexico, but I can understand how this Prime Minister might get the countries mixed up.

If you look at durum wheat or Canadian steel, the fact is that the Americans are running roughshod over this government.

In yesterday's decision on wire rod, for example, the Americans nailed Canada to the wall. But then miracle of miracles, they exempted Trinidad because that country was part of the Caribbean basin initiative.

This Prime Minister says he knows how to negotiate. Why was it that even Trinidad in the CBI was able to negotiate a better deal for its steel mills than was mighty Canada in the free trade agreement?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Now he is picking on Trinidad. I tell you, Madam Speaker, with these Liberals, nobody is safe.

Since the free trade agreement, Canadian exports to the United States have increased by approximately 25 per cent. Our job creation is up as a result of many billions of dollars of new exports to the United States.

• (1425)

Mr. Martin: Steel mills in Trinidad, Brian. That is the question.

Mr. Mulroney: The fact of the matter is that most countries would give their eye teeth to have a dispute

settlement mechanism such as the one we have with the United States of America.

It has served us extremely well. Canada has won more disputes under the independent dispute settlement mechanism than the United States has. It has been extremely advantageous to us. It gives Canada an instrument no one else has.

My hon. friend has some background in business. He knows full well how advantageous the free trade agreement is. He knows how advantageous the North American free trade agreement is.

Although it would not happen in my lifetime, if ever the Liberals formed a government, long after I am gone to the great beyond, decades and decades from now, even the Liberals would rise up and support the free trade agreement and NAFTA.

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POVERTY

Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Madam Speaker, last week the United Nations released its third report in as many months criticizing this government's social policies. That report harshly criticized the government for making no measurable progress on alleviating poverty or the severity of poverty.

My question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. He will know that social groups and the poor themselves have been saying the same thing. Now even the government's own advisory board, the National Council of Welfare, has concluded in its report that: "Clearly the federal government has contributed to the financial plight of welfare recipients".

Poverty is on the rise. The National Council of Welfare, the government's own advisory board, has said that the government is part of the problem.

When will this government change its social and economic policies? When will it become part of the solution, rather than part of problem?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, I could quarrel with the results of those two reports but I will not. I will say that there is no member in this House who is not concerned about poverty in Canada. It is one of the reasons that last year this government spent so much money on initiatives relating to children.