

Among some of the participants in the higher SES groups who exhibited more knowledge of and familiarity with the issues at stake in the Canada-U.S. free trade negotiations, several more precise and specific issues of concern were identified. In addition to the "fair and equal" imperative, some stressed the need for an agreement to limit the freedom of the Americans to continue their protectionist activities, such that an agreement would prevent both sides from being able to reinstate tariffs."

### C. What if Canada Decided Not to Sign a Free Trade Deal?

Overall, there was little serious concern expressed by Canadians consulted through the focus groups with the possibility of the Canadian government deciding not to sign a free trade deal with the United States. Specifically, participants were asked if it would concern them at all if, in effect, the Canadian government walked away from the table or decided not to sign a draft agreement worked out by negotiators for both sides.

There was a clear consensus among a majority of participants that "the government can clearly walk away from these negotiations." The reason or rationale presented for this assessment was a belief that the government would likely only take such a step if it was in Canada's interests. Typical of this outlook is the statement made by a Toronto group participant that "If we do sign a deal it must benefit most Canadians. If we turned it down, it meant that a free trade agreement was not in our own best interests." A few people did indicate, however, that they would not be pleased if Canada did not sign a free trade deal. Of concern to them was the effect which they perceived this might have on confidence in Canada and Canadian products in the international marketplace. Some viewed such a development as indicative of a lost opportunity for Canada to become more competitive internationally.

Little in the way of specifics emerged, as well, in response to a question asking participants what they thought "...was most important for the Canadian government to consider in looking at an agreement arrived at by the Canadian and American negotiators