

We do not bring legislation to this House and then put it on the shelf and forget about it. The hon. member knows that. He is trying to make an issue out of something that really is not fair at all. Once the bill is passed, our government will do what is necessary. If we brought out brochures and information packages, et cetera, before this bill was passed the hon. member, his leader and the rest of them would be up on their feet moaning and groaning about being out ahead of a bill. How can we promote this stuff before the bill is passed?

It is a weak argument.

Mr. Phillip Edmonston (Chambly): Mr. Speaker, I have the feeling I am in a love-in between the other two parties. If I may perhaps have your attention.

I would just like to ask a question of my colleague. I followed what he said with a great deal of interest and many of the things he said were pretty factual.

What I would like to ask him concerns a problem I am having with this whole question of free trade. Small businesses that have contacted me are very much concerned about the new free trade agreement that we may have with Mexico and the United States. Some of the small business people have told me that they have already had their business negatively affected by free trade with the United States. I see the Conservative tradition being established by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence saying he is against the helicopters while the Minister of National Defence says she is in favour of the purchase of the helicopters. Perhaps the minister could respond in a very objective manner, even if it does not go along with the party's policy and the general response given on free trade. It is the following question.

• (1300)

Inasmuch as certain businesses are going to be affected, negatively I am sure, and the American government has asked that there be certain ironclad, parallel agreements before going further, does the minister not think it would be prudent for Canada, before we go any further with NAFTA, to seek similar types of guarantees—I am talking about environment, working conditions and so forth—and do that at this stage as the United States is doing?

Supply

There are two reasons. First, in a substantive sense it would help us be more protective of our own jobs. Second, in a symbolic sense it might show that we are demanding certain concessions from Mexico that the U.S. is demanding from Mexico. We are doing this in a united way. I am not talking about government policy or government response. In free trade, would it not be more prudent to wait for those parallel agreements to come about before we go further?

Mr. McDermid: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is no. I will expand on that if I might.

We requested accords much like those being debated now a year ago February. That is on record. There is no question about that. At that time the administration of the United States turned it down.

In a speech some time in October the then candidate for the Democratic Party, Bill Clinton, stated that he would like some side agreements on the environment, on labour and on what we call snap-back or provisions that would protect sudden surges from countries into their marketplace of certain products. We had no problem with that and we are at the table with them as an equal partner. The three countries are negotiating these things.

At the same time, the NAFTA is not going to be changed. That was reinforced again by the President and by the negotiator just in the last week. They are not going to change the NAFTA. These are separate agreements that are being negotiated. As a matter of fact, the one on the environment and so on is one that we had promoted for over a year. We feel very comfortable in sitting down and negotiating these with our two partners in the NAFTA.

Each legislative body in Mexico, the United States and Canada has started to examine the NAFTA. It has not been put on hold in any one of the jurisdictions, including the United States. That procedure is going on. We are saying that while these side agreements are going on, which will not affect the NAFTA one iota—it is not going to be amended—the procedure will take place because all three countries are committed to implementing it on January 1, 1994. Again that was reiterated by the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Order. Resuming debate.