

The Address

United States under NAFTA, and under the Free Trade Agreement signed with that country.

Another illustration of a government which is on its knees, which is always giving in, which is not able to protect us against Americans or foreign interests and events, is how we have lost under the GATT, an opportunity to develop agriculture. We have lost control over a system which may have been one of the best in the world. During the GATT negotiations, we wanted to strengthen Article XI, because Canada's supply management system—and I know you all agree with me—was the best one in the world. There are no two ways about it, it was the best in the world. With that system, there was no overproduction, no dumping; everything was controlled and, in fact, that system was a model for the rest of the world.

• (1845)

To please other countries, we have had to sacrifice that great system that we had devoted so much time and energy to building. Had Canada really wanted to protect itself properly, it could have had Article XI reinforced. The fact is, and the hon. member will acknowledge it, that many countries and the Americans themselves managed to get all kinds of exemptions under the GATT. So, Canada could have had the provisions of Article XI strengthened, but did not. Canada backed off, it caved in, making people believe it had been isolated. In the end, we were left without a leg to stand on when in fact the Canadian government could have better protected supply management if it had really wanted to. Basically, it was not interested, and not having Article XI reinforced caused us another worse problem in agriculture.

This other problem generated by Canada's lack of resolve at the GATT talks is that it is more difficult now to maintain, in order to protect our supply management system with regard to areas where quotas are applied, the tariff rates that are supposed to protect supply management. Because of our failure at the GATT, the least we can do to allow the system to exist for a few more years to protect the farmers and give them time to adjust to the new global market environment, is to maintain a tariff barrier high enough to give our farmers a chance to adjust. It is only normal. Agriculture is not like a toy factory. You cannot just shut down overnight when you are dealing with livestock. You have to plan over a number of years.

So, the problem is that this tariff barrier which is supposed to protect supply management for at least a few years has already started to crumble. So soon! The ink is not even dry on the agreement that the government is backing off, reneging on the promises made to the farmers. The Minister of Agriculture has repeatedly promised Canadian farmers that he would do his utmost to protect Article XI. He did not. Then, the Minister of Agriculture said: "I will do everything in my power to make the tariff barrier high enough to maintain the supply management

system in Canada." That was just five weeks ago, but discussions are already under way with the Americans to eliminate the tariff on agricultural products such as ice cream and yogurt.

I could have gone on for another 20 minutes, but let me at least conclude my remarks.

[English]

In spite of the fact that the minister of agriculture for Canada is a very kind and well spoken lawyer and not a farmer, I am beginning to think we have a rather wishy-washy minister of agriculture, because in the great tradition of ministers of agriculture for Canada he is unable to say no to Americans. He is unable to stand and defend the rights and privileges we have won in negotiations with the United States and other countries. We have a minister who unfortunately because of this weakness puts into question a lot of the strengths of Canadian agriculture. It is most regrettable.

[Translation]

I think that there are many good things to say about agriculture, but I will have to wait for another day.

• (1850)

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of my colleague. He no doubt realizes that almost everyone wants him to explain his statement and most Canadians who were watching their television set will understand why. His message was, to say the least, a bit confused; it was as clear as mud.

At the beginning of his speech, he spoke about the rights of the francophones outside Quebec, like me. He then talked about agriculture.

I would like to ask him a question about the francophones outside Quebec since I am one of the 500 000 francophones living in Ontario. If I am not mistaken, the Bloc Quebecois position as it was explained to us twenty minutes ago is more or less as follows: Quebec should split from the rest of Canada because the rights of francophones in Ontario have not been properly respected. I must say I have a hard time understanding that statement.

If Quebec were sovereign, how would that improve the respect shown for the rights of francophones in Ontario? How would that improve the situation of Franco-Ontarians?

After that, maybe the member could explain—no. I will stop here and let my colleagues ask other questions.

Mr. Marchand: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is accusing me of being confused. He is the one who is confused since I did not mention the rights of Franco-Ontarians. In my speech, I talked about agriculture and, frankly, I am rather hurt that he did not ask any question on this very interesting topic.