

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

United States, we would need to have a transition adjustment insurance program for workers.

• (1520)

I have heard Simon Reisman's name used in sacred terms by members of the Government, St. Simon himself, the author of this agreement, the man who will win the humanitarian of the year award from the B'nai B'rith for his felicitous, kind words during the election campaign, that great public servant, of course, not interfering in a partisan way in the election campaign. St. Simon himself has said that one of the essential ingredients of any trade agreement is the inclusion of an adjustment program, but the Government did not see fit to include it. Why would it have even the slightest hesitation in accepting an amendment of this kind? The Americans presumably would not be upset, but maybe they would.

Then I take you to the testimony of Gordon Richard, the deputy trade negotiator, who when he appeared before the committee last summer, was faced with a question on the very same amendment. He explained to the committee that one of the reasons the amendment could not be accepted is that under the agreement, future adjustment programs would be vulnerable to counterattack by the United States. We would be subject to countervail by any industry or group that received a new adjustment program.

Now we understand why the Government does not want amendments dealing with adjustment. It did not want to face the truth and reality which is, in the words of its own official, that the agreement itself would preclude the establishment of new adjustment programs. I say in all honesty, it is cruel not to have an amendment like this in the Bill because workers will be affected, people will be put out of jobs and communities will be closing down.

That Mickey Mouse program that the Minister of Employment calls the Canadian Jobs Strategy has been criticized by the House of Commons committee itself. The Tory members of the committee said it is not working. Its budget has been cut back by 30 per cent or \$500 million. It is a total failure in providing decent training for Canadians from one coast to the other. Its unemployment insurance program has new severance rules which prevent older workers from getting decent training. It is not a proper support for those workers and it is cruel and inhumane to throw workers on the scrap heap simply because this Government is afraid of what the United States might do to it under this agreement.

Similarly, we moved other amendments, and we would have moved others given the opportunity. Have you seen anything so far that upsets the apple cart, Madam Speaker? Hardly. We wanted to put forward another amendment which said that for greater certainty, nothing in the Act or agreement shall be so interpreted as to affect the continuation of existing or the establishment of new Canadian social programs including health care systems, unemployment insurance, child care, pensions minimum wage, labour law, maternity benefits and so forth. Is there something wrong with saying that in the Bill, greater certainty should be established to ensure that this agreement would not lead to the suppression of those programs? We have heard statement after statement made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) indicating that no such programs will be affected, so what is wrong with entrenching in the legislation his own words? What is the Government afraid of? Why would it not want to have the Prime Minister's own words in the legislation itself?

Mr. Keyes: Maybe the U.S. does not want it?

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): I am receiving a great deal of assistance from my colleagues. They are a wonderful source of inspiration.

If we start looking at the evidence, we begin to know why. We already know that there have been trade actions which take direct target at many of our social programs. To wit, the United States trade law passed last August, the omnibus Trade Bill, includes within it a new definition of subsidy, something the Minister for International Trade never talked about, which said that any Canadian industry that receives a grant that is specifically targeted or can be construed to be a wage subsidy would be countervailable. That would include things like guaranteed annual incomes, even maternity benefits and assistance to the working poor. Those are the kinds of programs that any decent, humane Government may want to consider.

In order to give some protection for those programs from action by the United States, there should be something in the legislation to say this was the clear meaning of the Government of Canada. Once again, we received from the Government nothing but a deaf ear. I suggest that that makes all those brave promises and commitments made by the Prime Minister during the election campaign ring hollow. That shows just how unwilling he and Members of his front bench are in living up to their word. This has not been a strong point