

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

Madam Chairman, the Hon. Member has just said that the Free Trade Agreement will guarantee a flourishing economy. I would like to know whether he is saying that to the Gillette workers.

Mr. Charest: It seems to me, Madam Chairman, that the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) should know that in Committee of the Whole, her question is absolutely not a point of order. We are surprised that now, after four years of experience in the House of Commons, she does not know better. Maybe we should not be surprised, Madam Speaker. But anyway—

It is obviously not a point of order.

Mr. Plamondon: Madam Chairman, I think that if each and every time we disagreed with the arguments put forward by members of the Opposition or the NDP, we would be rising on points of order at every word so to speak. But we extended them the courtesy of hearing them, and I hope Opposition Members will extend me the same courtesy by hearing my arguments. I would be most pleased to join the Hon. Member at any time in a debate on workers' problems and the number of new jobs created by this Government, as opposed to the number of jobs lost when they were the Government.

But let me come back, Madam Chairman, to the matter of social measures. I was saying that those same social programs cannot be viewed as subsidies, because under a principle of international law, under the American and Canadian legislations, they are not when they apply to the whole population, such as health care, unemployment insurance, old age security pensions, maternity benefits and other social benefits.

Moreover, government services such as health care are excluded from the agreement. Only management services for health care facilities, such as maintenance, food services and payroll services come under the agreement.

The inclusion of those services, Madam Chairman, only recognized the *status quo*. It will neither encourage nor discourage the entry of American firms into the management of health care facilities. The activities of those businesses have been and will be under the jurisdiction of provincial Governments; where a provincial Government decided to privatize the management of those health facilities and thereby to allow American firms to bid for contracts, American firms wishing to locate in Canada could then do so.

The inclusion of management services for health care facilities, Madam Chairman, in no way threatens the

viability of our programs. The Free Trade Agreement poses no threat, and provinces have all the leeway needed to manage their own facilities.

If I may, Madam Chairman, I should like to quote Mr. Ritchie who was on the Canadian team which negotiated the free trade deal. He said:

If these facilities are administered by the federal or provincial Governments, if they are quasi-public and non-profit making, in all such cases they are not covered (by the Free Trade Agreement). Even if they are commercial. Of course, the Governments have every right to regulate, even regulate who can become the owner of such facilities.

As Mr. Ritchie sees it, clearly the problem of privatizing health facilities has nothing to do with the free trade deal.

Ninety-five per cent of Canadian hospitals are publicly-owned, therefore they are not covered under the FTA. As long as these facilities remain public property, nothing in the trade agreement threatens the ownership of our hospitals. When there is talk of managing health care facilities, the reference is to services only, services such as computers and catering, for example.

Madam Chairman, I am proud to live in a country which over the years has managed to use its resources in such a way as to make it possible for all citizens to enjoy decent living conditions. I know that all Government Members share my views.

Madam Chairman, we are not the only people in this country who are convinced that the Free Trade Agreement will not affect our social programs. Eminent personalities like Judge Emmet Hall, the father of health insurance in Canada, Claude Castonguay, who is mainly responsible for giving Quebec health insurance, Thérèse Lavoie-Roux, Quebec's Minister of Health and Social Services, Pierre-Marc Johnson, former Minister of Social Affairs in Quebec, Bernard Landry and so many others have maintained that nothing in this Agreement endangers the viability of our social programs.

But there is more than expert opinion, Madam Chairman; there are all those Canadians who on November 21 gave the Conservative party a second mandate to bring this great enterprise, the Free Trade Agreement, to completion. They are people who care about the future of the country, as we do, and who have understood that Canada's sovereignty in the field of social policy is not threatened by this Agreement. There are all my constituents in the riding of Richelieu, Madam Chairman, who gave me a second mandate and