

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

Our vision says that all advances in social, regional and cultural policies that we have made so far in this century, particularly in the last few decades, need to be improved, not destroyed. Our vision says that it is time for fair trade, for regional fairness, for equality for women, for a secure future for our children. Our vision and our understanding of the present says that it is time, at last, for a New Democratic Party Government.

The Prime Minister gave an interesting interview the other night on television. I watched with care. I do not always pay fascinated attention to what the Prime Minister has to say, nor does he pay fascinated attention to what I have to say, but like many Canadians, I was watching to see if he would finally do what we believe is important and make it very clear that we would have an election. Well, he did say that we have a tradition of four years—and if it was not his words, it was certainly the argument—that it was an aberration to depart from that tradition, and that he planned to stay with that tradition. I hope he does.

● (1850)

I would like to conclude with the words of a very distinguished politician and say to the Prime Minister tonight, Sir: "You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go". Call an election!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to be here this evening to take part in what in many ways is an historic debate on this piece of legislation and to say a few words about agriculture.

Agriculture has always been important to the country. It is one of the main reasons this country was settled. If we look back at our Confederation we see that agriculture was one of the original departments of government. Our history to date has been in making this land flourish and produce. In short, it has been to make it productive. There is no doubt in anyone's mind who is connected with agriculture, as I am as a farmer, that agriculture will play an important part in our future. That is why this agreement is so important for the future of agriculture.

We have tremendous production potential in Canada. Canada as a country has more land per capita than any country in the world, especially when we compare ourselves to the United States with a relatively large land base and a relatively large population, and when we compare ourselves to Japan with a relatively large population base and very little land. There are some 25 million people in Canada, 250 million or thereabouts in the United States, and about 120 million in Japan. That tells us something right there. It is that Canada does not have a large population to serve as far as agricultural production is concerned.

It is evident in other areas as well. Some 30 per cent of everything that Canada produces has to be exported. What

does that mean? If we compare that to other countries such as Japan, we see that 15 per cent of what is produced in that country has to be exported. In the United States only 10 per cent of what is produced has to be exported. Thus we can see that Canada is very dependent on trade.

On average, a Canadian farmer earns at least 40 cents out of every dollar from trade. The figures vary from region to region and from product to product. Some 80 per cent of the wheat that we produce is exported; 70 per cent of Canola is exported, either directly as Canola or Canola product; 50 per cent of our barley is exported; and 40 per cent of our hogs are exported. We are very dependent on trade. That is why we have to think that this agreement will be very important for the future of Canadian agriculture.

Why have we been able to be so productive? It is because we have been good at what we do. With the establishment of the Department of Agriculture as an original Department at Confederation, we very quickly established experimental farms. In fact, the experimental farms in Canada celebrated their one hundredth anniversary two years ago. We have done other things. We have been leaders in plant and animal breeding. We are world leaders in embryo transplants. We have as good a gene pool in our livestock herd as any place in the world. That includes dairy cattle, beef cattle, pork, and poultry. If one goes anywhere in the world, people talk about how good Canada is in agricultural production. We have done it because of the kind of people that we are.

When we listen to some of the things that are being said about this agreement, we hear that it will cause problems and that by implication we will have a difficult time competing. It makes one wonder what our ancestors would have thought had they been here today to hear that. They came here and were told by Palliser, the original doomsayer, that the area which eventually came to be called the Palliser Triangle between the Mississippi Valley and the Pacific Coast would never, ever support settlement because of the type of vegetation that that land was able to produce.

When we consider that our ancestors came here against those types of odds and literally made the country flourish and produce with no roads, no electricity, no television, no schools—none of the things that all of us take for granted today that we like to have for our families—one wonders what they would say when we have the type of opportunity that we have and there are among us doubters in how good we can be in the international market. I find that very difficult to accept as a farmer.

As the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) said today, one cannot hide from trade. One has to look for opportunities. That is what this agreement does. It does not guarantee us anything but it provides us an opportunity.

I am the fourth generation in my family who has lived on this continent, the fourth generation of farmers, and I am the first generation born in this country. Why did my ancestors