

Supply

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY, S.O. 82—CANADA-U.S. FREE TRADE
NEGOTIATIONS—SUSPENSION OF UNILATERAL TARIFF ACTION

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Broadbent:

That this House condemns the failure of the government to act in Canada's interests in the free trade discussion with the United States and, in particular, for its failure to obtain an agreement to suspend unilateral tariff action by either country during the period of these discussions; and on the amendment of Mr. Axworthy (p. 13900).

Mr. Speaker: When the House rose, we were in the question and comment period of the speech by the Hon. Member for Essex—Windsor (Mr. Langdon). Was the Hon. Member about to reply?

Mr. Langdon: Yes, Mr. Speaker. A comment had been made by the Hon. Member for North Vancouver—Burnaby (Mr. Cook). I believe that the key points raised by the Hon. Member demonstrated quite clearly the point I was making about the way in which the Conservative Party has consistently lowered itself to the use of political insult instead of dealing with the substance of this issue. This gave rise to the suggestion that we were playing politics by taking an honest and sincere position on this issue.

The Hon. Member raised a second point concerning secrecy and suggested that as good poker players we should recognize we would be giving the Americans the upper hand by laying out all the studies that the Government was using. I want to make it quite clear to the Hon. Member that the Americans have the upper hand and it has not had anything to do with secrecy on the part of the Canadian Government.

I also want to point out that the false analysis by the Conservative Government in that argument is belied by the fact that it finally came out with 26 or 27 special studies which dealt with the issues of free trade. I believe that was also a fatuous and unnecessary attempt to act on a basis of flimflam, instead of bringing this important issue about the future of the country to a forthright debate. We could disagree about principles, disagree about arguments and disagree about facts, but at least respect the intentions of the Members on each side of the House.

Mr. Cook: Mr. Speaker, my only comment is that the Member for Essex—Windsor cannot have it both ways. He cannot complain that we are keeping everything secret, then turn around and compliment us for issuing a number of studies. During his speech he berated us for secrecy, but now in response to a question he says that we cannot keep things secret because we have already issued studies. If you have them, what are you complaining about?

Mr. Langdon: Mr. Speaker, as usual, the Conservative Party is trying to have it both ways. As usual, the Conservative Party

has maintained secrecy with respect to this issue throughout the months in which it tried to use propaganda. We all remember the marvellous videos which reached our offices in which, unfortunately, Prince Edward Island was somehow overlooked. We had that kind of propaganda. We had secrecy with respect to the studies. Finally, the Conservative Government recognized that the secrecy had to be turned around. It did so, not because of its good intentions but for two other reasons; first, because it saw that the Information Commissioner of the Government was taking the Government to court. Here was a remarkable development. One arm of the Government was taking the other arm of the Government to court. Second, the office of the trade negotiator started to get a little bit "antsy" because we began to talk about getting a court injunction saying the Government could not take these talks to their first stages as long as the secrecy prevailed.

● (1510)

In the end, the Conservative Government brought out its 26 or 27 studies, none of which threatened the national security or the poker playing ability of the Government. However, it did at the same time leave masses of blank papers within virtually every study. Some people took it for granted that these blank papers represented something the Conservative Party was trying to hide and they were full of information. On the other hand, I took it for granted that the blank pages actually represented the absence of thought or analysis by the Conservative Government. So it was no surprise to me to see these hundreds of pieces of blank paper in the studies the Government finally released.

Mr. Dave Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to participate in the debate this afternoon on a motion put forward by my colleague in the New Democratic Party. It has been subsequently amended by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy) and I will not add a second or third amendment, but there is perhaps one word omitted in the motion put forward by the NDP. The word I would use in the motion is the word "incompetence"; the incompetence of the Government of Canada in how it has handled the various free-trade talks now underway with our largest trading partner, the United States.

I do not believe anyone in this Parliament can doubt or question the trading relationship between Canada and the United States as it relates to its importance to Canada and the creation of economic wealth. Our trading relationship with the United States is very important. In my region of Atlantic Canada, and I say this, Mr. Speaker, because I know you have great concern about the various regions of the country, free trade has, historically, been sought by the people in Atlantic Canada, for a good number of years. This goes back to the early days of Confederation. I am sure the same argument could flow from the people of western Canada about their efforts to obtain some sort of free trade agreement with the United States.