

Government Orders

only to do with the protection of buyers and sellers. They have only to do with the protection of people who are owners and there is very little protection, if any, at the international or global level, having to do with the protection of workers.

Where we have seen such international agreements, particularly those into which Canada has entered such as the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, we have seen very little protection for workers as opposed to protection for buyers and sellers. The government is now contemplating entering into a further free trade agreement, in this case a three-way free trade agreement with Mexico which we believe would put Canadian workers at even more risk than they are at now as a result of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. It is not often that we get a chance to debate trade in this House. Unfortunately, the debate about the government's position on the Canada-U.S.-Mexico free trade talks has been happening only in committee and in the media and wherever else concerned members have been able to raise the profile of that issue.

• (1700)

We have not had a chance to debate it here in the House. I think that this bill provides us with an opportunity to talk about the international regulation of trade and the unfortunate trend in the world today of moving toward regional trading blocs, perhaps even hemispheric trading blocs.

I had the opportunity to attend an external affairs committee meeting recently at which we had one of the key academic supporters present. That is, academic supporters of a Canada-U.S.-Mexico free trade agreement. He told the committee that he saw this as the precursor of one more step toward a hemispheric free trade agreement, in which Canada would not only be in a free trade arrangement with Mexico, but with all the countries of Central and South America.

Mr. Lewis: That would be awful.

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I hear someone across the way saying that would be awful. What is awful about it is that we have no indication from this government or from the United States Government or for that matter, as far as I know, from the Mexican Government, that they see the competition which would be brought in by any free

trade agreement, as competition that needs to exist in the context of some social base.

The member who spoke before me referred to this social charter that is to come into effect with the full integration of the European communities' economy in 1992. What we see is an acknowledgement of the fact that if one is going to have a truly level playing field, along with economic integration and unfettered competition, then one must have an agreement between countries as to what the floor is with respect to social standards.

As Europe moves toward the single market of 1992, they are coming to an agreement. Having already broken through the conceptual barrier of saying there should be a social charter, they are coming to an agreement on what the basic income standards should be, basic pension legislation, basic labour legislation and beyond the social charter of what their common environmental standards will be. This is the sort of thing which we do not have in the context of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. It is the kind of thing which we certainly will not have in any Canada-U.S.-Mexico Free Trade Agreement. It is the kind of thing we do not have in any form of any multilateral trading context now through the GATT or anything else.

What we are saying and have constantly been saying since the beginning of the NDP Party comes out of a conviction that the marketplace itself, without these kinds of agreements about social standards, delivers only misery, if it is allowed to work itself out without these kinds of checks by government on what the private sector is allowed to pay people and the various other regulations that I have talked about.

There is a curious irony in the argument. In a way, we are saying that if there is going to be economic integration, there has to be a harmonization of sorts. Yet, harmonization is the very thing that we worried about in the debate on the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. We worried about it then and we worry about it still in the context of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. If there were to be harmonization of social or environmental or whatever standards in the context of a Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, given the asymmetry of the relationship between Canada and the United States and the size of America compared to the size of Canada, we think the likelihood would be a harmonization down toward American social standards. In the context of a Canada-U.S.-Mexico agreement, it would be harmonization even further downward. This is quite different