

## VI. PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS AND DIMENSION OF CHANGES ASSOCIATED WITH FREE TRADE

Virtually all participants expressed dissatisfaction with the way the federal government and its trade negotiators are handling the negotiations with the Americans. The majority did not believe that these negotiations were being held in consultation with the Premiers, despite the much publicized and regular consultations at the First Minister level.

The secrecy of the talks, or more precisely a lack of explicit information and the apparent "rush" to sign an accord, were important concerns shared by most participants. Some believed that Canada appears too anxious to sign an accord, which they felt would play to the advantage of the United States which appears to be a reticent player in the talks to many. Most believed that Canada will have to give up too much in a deal with the Americans, "who'll hold out for number 1."

Participants were asked if they would be concerned if the Canadian government decided not sign an accord. The wide majority said they would be reassured by this because it would indicate to them that the government could not reach a deal that meets Canadian interests. On the other hand, few individuals would be concerned about American sanctions if Canada decided not to sign.

The majority are in favour of a referendum on the issue.

The key factors which people felt the government should focus on in deciding whether to sign a draft agreement were public consensus, independence and benefits for Canada. Statements presenting these concerns were as follows: "Public opinion consensus," "majority rule," "clear long term benefits for Canada," "Canada stays Canadian," and "political independence for Canada."

### A. Dimension of Change

Very little change was expected in the short term should a free trade agreement be signed with the United States. Also, few believed that it would represent a major break from the present situation. As indicated above, however, most strongly believed that the "Americanization" of Canada had begun and that this would be accelerated under free trade.