

III. GOOD IDEA OR BAD IDEA?

A. Overall

The majority of focus group participants believed that the free trade agreement was a bad thing for Canada and Quebec. This contrasts with the results of the June nation-wide telephone survey conducted by Decima, showing that 52% of Quebecers think that Canada entering into a free trade agreement with the United States is a good idea, while 43% think it is a bad idea. Among the focus group participants, the "overwhelming superiority" of the United States was viewed as inhibiting fair negotiations between the two countries. There were also several individuals who believed that the U.S. had a "hidden agenda" behind their participation in the talks. A comment expressing this sentiment was that "Maybe we won't see the negatives right away because the U.S. will present it as a golden opportunity, but in the long run it will enable them to take our country over."

A minority believed it would be a good thing for Canada as long as the agreement reached was equitable, and there existed some form of overseeing body to ensure adherence to the accord and to resolve disputes. An individual expressed concern over the United States' relative independence from other international adjudicative bodies and felt that it would have to be an "iron-clad contract" in order for the United States to respect its agreement at all times. A businesswoman and a policeman believed it would be good for Canada and Quebec, because it would bring jobs and new markets for our goods, and more economic growth for Quebec and Canada.

The elements of a "good" deal for Canada were seen to include the following:

- o If the business community (especially Quebec entrepreneurs) felt it was a good deal;
- o If the value of the Canadian dollar was protected and did not suffer from the strong U.S. dollar;
- o If interest rates were stabilized;
- o If it was clear that the benefits and costs of a free trade agreement for both countries were equal;