

Opposition shows that most of their grievances about the free trade agreement can be traced back to their erroneous interpretation of the documents we have before us, Madam Speaker.

There is no doubt in my mind that the benefits of this agreement are unparalleled. As a matter of fact, the agreement negotiated with our main trading partner gives us access to the American market and unveils challenging prospects for the coming century. This has to be reassuring, if only because over the past two years the Canadian agricultural community has grown ever more concerned about the protectionist stance of our neighbours to the south. I suggest it was to some extent unanimously felt that we had to do something. We had to take some concrete action to get out of the status quo. Without this Free Trade Agreement, we had to expect the possible narrowing of our outlets in our most important market. Because of this agreement, Canada will get a more secure and a duty free access to the American market for our agricultural exports. That is undeniably a step forward.

• (1640)

Madam Speaker, I just cannot understand the sort of stubbornness with which our colleagues are trying to denigrate this agreement. Should we conclude that, as Members of the Opposition parties, they have chosen to oppose at any cost a major policy of this Government which, need I emphasize it, has nothing to do with party politics. Madam Speaker, we are taking up a challenge which will make it possible for our children and for Canadians to enter at full speed in the 21st century, to stand up, without hiding behind curtains, and to show that we are quite able to trade with the rest of the world, without any concern.

These bilateral negotiations, need I emphasize it, have been conducted brilliantly. The resulting agreement will go down in history as one of the most positive and most significant events for a trading nation such as Canada. These negotiations were not carried out in secret, Madam Speaker. And all the while they lasted, numerous committees and subcommittees advised our negotiators on the views held by Canadians on each of the issues on the table. This should not be a surprise to anyone. It is consistent with this Government's disposition over the past three years to consult the Canadians for whom we are working. I think we should not feel embarrassed about that—we had consultations with people. There was a sub-committee on agriculture, and people from every region, every industry, processors, producers, everyone was consulted. Everyone could make his contribution to help negotiators at the table.

Courage and political vision were needed to admit that most industries in our farming economy could not survive alone, without external trade. And since the United States are by far our major customer, buying a third of our total agri-food exports, it would have been stupid not to take that golden opportunity, free trade. We are often told by the Opposition: Let us forget about negotiations with the Americans, let us negotiate at the GATT level. As if it were easier to agree with

### *Supply*

94 nations scattered over all the continents, with different needs and goals, when we have a customer next door with whom we have close affinities and with whom we are already trading!

**An. Hon. Member:** Our natural market!

**Mr. Blais:**—our natural market close by. They tell us: No, do not negotiate, forget about that. Let us not put all our eggs in one basket, as I heard. That is ridiculous, Madam Speaker. We owe our people and our producers in Canada to be secure, to maintain what we already have acquired. That is important, and we owe it to our producers. And in the face of the growing threat of tariff and non-tariff barriers, not only in the United States but elsewhere in the world, faced with that wind of protectionism that was blowing, we had to move, we had to do something. We could not stay still and wait for new protectionist moves falling on us every six months. It takes courage and political vision to act that way. That is a responsible government, Madam Speaker.

I think we at last have the possibility to put an end to certain protectionist practices which have been disastrous in the past, disrupted trade and caused severe problems to many areas of our economy, especially agriculture. Canada simply could no longer afford the luxury of maintaining the status quo.

Concerning some of the objections contained in the motion, I think, Madam Speaker, that no one wants to undermine the powers of national marketing boards. The new free trade agreement, as my colleague from Essex—Kent mentioned earlier, does not undermine these boards or the supply management system which is the reason why they exist. It would be foolish, Madam Speaker, to abandon a system whose value and efficiency are recognized worldwide. Last year only, delegations from over twenty countries came to Canada to see how our marketing system works. It is a model for every one. This proven marketing system does not put any pressure on world surpluses in the agri-food area. It is a system based on discipline.

As my colleague, the Minister for International Trade (Miss Carney) said this week or last week about our negotiations with GATT, we are trying, as a country, to bring our trading partners and other countries working in the agricultural field to think of where we are going with this international subsidy war. Canada was the second country, out of 94, to express its intentions internationally in the agricultural field. We are leading other countries and people know where we are going. We are saying: Stop this war. But this is no reason to reject the proven system we have in Canada, a system we will never abandon unless we can replace it with a better one. We owe this to our Canadian agricultural producers who worked hard for years to build a system that works.

And it is being irresponsible for people outside the House and on the Opposition side to try to have the producers believe that we are putting that system at stake. That is not the case at all, Madam Speaker. And we owe it to Canadian producers