

Free Trade

How can it only be a trade deal when it extends its reach into every jurisdiction in this country, including energy, agriculture, services and banking?

We are being told that as legislators we can no longer make decisions in these areas. We can no longer have the right as a sovereign Parliament to make laws and rules according to our best judgment, after debating them with other Canadians and other provinces and coming to grips with the issues in the fine old Canadian tradition. No longer do we have rights in these areas.

Vast areas within public jurisdiction in Canada have disappeared and future generations of Canadians will never have the rights in these areas that were enjoyed by previous generations. That is not a trade agreement. It is a form of sovereignty association, economic union, economic integration. Whatever one wishes to call it, it goes far beyond the boundaries of trade.

If we were simply negotiating a reduction of tariffs, there might be less worry because we could debate that in terms of its direct impact on industries. This far-reaching agreement extends into uncharted waters for which Canadians have no map to understand it. How can the Minister say with any credibility that it is simply a little trade matter about which Canadians should not worry.

One must ask if the Minister ever wonders why Canadians from coast to coast, in every region, are exercised and anguished about this deal? That would not be the case if this was simply a matter of reducing some tariffs on vegetables or other items. We are seeing incredible division, anxiety and controversy in Canada because Canadians see their fundamental right to choose what kind of country they want in the area of public policy disappear in front of them.

It is fascinating that a Prime Minister who said he would seek election on a platform of national reconciliation is offering what will undoubtedly be the most disputatious and divisive initiative in the history of this country. It is dividing people all across Canada, and not only on regional grounds, because we discovered in committee that people in Alberta are as deeply divided on this issue as people in Ontario, Quebec or the Atlantic Provinces. Yet we heard those scurrilous attempts by the Prime Minister and the Premier of Saskatchewan to suggest this is just a matter of the West versus Ontario. What a low-life approach.

Mr. McDermid: He never said that.

Mr. Axworthy: The Prime Minister, who was going to be the author of national reconciliation, is in fact trying to set region against region in a way that is simply designed to sell his arrangement with Mr. Reagan. That is hardly in the national interest when one sees how deeply this proposal cuts into the very soul of this country.

Let us consider the arguments being advanced by the Government. It was fascinating to hear the somewhat qualified

remarks of the Minister for International Trade today. Unlike the bombast of the past, today we did not hear those kinds of grand, eloquent promises. When the Prime Minister announced this agreement, he said that it would be the solution for all that ails Canada.

Mr. McDermid: He never said that.

Mr. Axworthy: He said that if there were problems with regional development, free trade with the U.S. will help that.

Mr. McDermid: He never said that.

Mr. Axworthy: Yes, he did.

Mr. McDermid: No, he did not.

Mr. Axworthy: Yes, he did. He said if there are problems with productivity, free trade will help it. If there are problems with growth, free trade will help it. It will also help grow hair and eliminate warts at the same time. That is all it will do, eliminate warts.

Mr. Marchi: The Parliamentary Secretary is interested.

Mr. Axworthy: Perhaps the Parliamentary Secretary is interested in it because he thinks it will grow hair.

The Government, its business allies and other advocates of this deal have presented no hard, clear evidence to demonstrate to Canadians exactly what economic benefits there will be. During our committee hearings throughout the country, we heard from various economists, chambers of commerce spokesmen and BCNI officials. Not once were they able to provide us with what one would call substantial evidence that there will be jobs. They hoped there would be jobs, they believed there would be jobs, and felt that there would be jobs, but not once were they able to provide the evidence that there will be jobs. There is no evidence.

If one considers the historical facts, there is no guarantee that a free trade region will automatically bring about all the promised benefits. I suggest that Members ask people in northern England, Scotland or Wales how Great Britain joining the Common Market has helped the regional divisions in Great Britain. The fact is that it has exacerbated them. How has it helped the unemployment rate? The unemployment rate in Britain was 5 per cent before it joined the Common Market. It went up to 15 per cent after it joined.

The Government talks about productivity. It is interesting to note that in the last 10 years we have had a higher productivity rate than the United States, even with its access to that market of 250 million people. We hear the argument that access to that market will make us more productive. Why are we more productive now than the Americans? We are not only being asked to accept a leap in faith, we are being asked to accept a leap in logic.

If the Common Market is so great, why have we had a higher rate of job creation in the last 10 years than any