

The Free Trade Agreement is a gold mine for companies like *Fer et Titane* and large companies such as Soreltech in the Sorel-Tracy and neighboring regions. Those regions were predestined for free trade. I salute the voters in my riding of Richelieu and thank them once again for the wide margin and the 69 per cent majority they gave me. I intend to keep working as I have done during the past four years, that is, to represent them and voice their concerns in this Chamber, and, especially, to ensure the economic growth of my riding.

Mr. Chairman, as we are now reviewing Clause 2 of the Free Trade Bill which deals mainly with definitions, I would like to share with you a few thoughts concerning social programs. Our social programs received special attention from the Liberals during the election campaign, a campaign based on fear, a lack of confidence in Canada and in Canadians' ability to perform in the North American context. As they had too few economic arguments, the Liberals turned to scaremongering, saying that our hospitals and our social programs would be jeopardized by the Free Trade Agreement. Experts proved it wasn't so, of course, and we had to remind the Liberals and the people of Canada that their fears were totally unfounded!

On the issue of federal-provincial relations, the Liberals claimed that it was impossible to come to any agreement with the provinces. Yet, we managed to do so. They have always been rather arrogant. This reminds me of an anecdote concerning the Liberal team which was in office before we took over in 1984. It seems there was an African province which had a problem with elephants. So this African province appeared before the United Nations and urged that a special commission be appointed to solve the problem created by surplus elephants within its territory. Thus Canada was appointed, as were France and England of course, along with the Americans, and their mandate was to find a solution to the problem of surplus elephants in that province.

The Americans did not waste any time coming up with their solution: How to can elephants and sell them for human consumption. The French produced a report entitled: Is control of unwed female elephants possible? Our English friends took a novel approach in their report: Can we organize safaris for the royal family with a view to reducing the number of elephants in that region of Africa? But nary a word from the Canadians, the Liberal Government just could not produce a report. So two months later the UN President called and said:

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Are you going to release your report on the elephant problem? Two months later they delivered a long report entitled: Do elephants fall under provincial or federal jurisdiction?

So that is the kind of Government we had, forever wondering, before intervening, whether a given issue was a provincial or federal responsibility, instead of creating a climate of co-operation between the provinces, as this Government has done, which has resulted in a significant economic fallout in all ridings throughout Quebec and the rest of Canada.

Since the trade agreement was signed we have often said that the integrity of Canada's social security system is not threatened by the Free Trade Agreement. Indeed, Mr. Chairman, the greatest threat against our social programs would be a stagnant economy, protectionism and the status quo. Not only does the trade deal not threaten our social programs, but our Government and future Governments will have all the leeway they need to prepare new social policies to meet the needs of all Canadians. Our social security system is second to none in the world and we are proud of this collective achievement.

Mr. Chairman, history has shown that we can enhance our social system while remaining competitive on the market. Canadian companies have shown that they can compete internationally and the argument that social programs are an unfair burden and hurt the competitiveness of Canadian companies is invalid.

In 1965, Madam Chairman, Canada acquired a health insurance program and over the next 20 years, trade with the United States grew steadily to reach nearly 80 per cent of our total exports. During this time, health insurance was never considered an unfair burden by business. Why would we believe today, Madam Chairman, that our health insurance program or our old age security pension plan in particular would affect our ability to compete? Only a flourishing economy is able to give a country an adequate social security system for its people. And that is just what the Free Trade Agreement will give Canada: prosperity.

These same social programs, Madam Chairman, cannot be considered subsidies because—

• (2110)

Ms. Copps: Madam Chairman, if you know the Standing Orders, you know that Members may talk about anything in the House when it sits in Committee of the Whole.