

*Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*

Madam Speaker, Canadians are fully aware that our country is experiencing exceptional changes, and the Free Trade Agreement is one of the many aspects of these changes, although it is a major factor. Four years ago, Madam Speaker, Canadians got tired of a regime which had divided their country and had been unable to show economic leadership, so they elected a new Government which advocated a fresh economic approach and genuine national reconciliation.

Four years ago the Progressive Conservative Party chalked up an unprecedented victory and, under the direction of the new Government, Canada was about to undertake an historic change in policy.

Discarding the autocratic and arrogant attitude which was the hallmark of the previous administration, the new Government chose from the outset to play fair with the provinces and show confidence in them. Rather than simply maintaining the centralizing and arrogant economic approach of the previous administration, the new Government tackled the issue of redefining Canada's economic priorities and reconsidering the role the state has to play to promote development.

Banking on the country's economic potential and the ability of all Canadians, the Progressive Conservative Government decided to level with the private sector and show confidence in the entrepreneurship of Canadian men and women. Because Canadians are quite capable of holding their own on international markets, the Government's new economic strategy was to look far beyond our own borders. The free trade deal with our major partner has widened our horizons and will make it a lot easier for us to take our rightful place in the economy of the continent and of the entire world.

In short, the 1984 election has proved to be more than a simple change of Government. It marked, for Canada, the beginning of a new era both politically and economically.

At the political level, our country is now more confident than ever before. At the economic level, our country had the best performance of the seven most developed countries. The change initiated in 1984 was profitable in every respect. That is why Canadian men and women decided on November 21 to renew the mandate of the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and his team.

Madam Speaker, an issue which our Government feels is most important and which was raised on many occasions by the Opposition during this debate on the

Free Trade Agreement is that of our ability to ensure the development of all the regions.

How about the Montreal region? Over the past four years, Madam Speaker, what was profitable for Canada also proved profitable for the Montreal region.

To be convinced of that, one needs only remind the House of the general climate which existed hardly five years ago. Having just escaped the worst economic recession of the past fifty years, the region was still assessing the extent of the damage and licking its wounds.

Plant closures, job cutbacks, production rationalization, aging of the industrial infrastructures, etc. The structural weakness accumulated over nearly a quarter of a century were revealed during the recession. A fatalist attitude was gaining ground. This sentiment was strengthened by the clear indifference demonstrated by the Government of Canada towards the region. The federal economic strategies which prevailed at the time, introduced a quarter of a century ago, had been planned in Ottawa and imposed on the region. Whether it was in the field of energy, financial services or air transport, the implicit message the federal Government was giving investors was clear: We know what is good for Canada and the Montreal region will just have to adapt . . .

It is not surprising, Madam Speaker, that in such a context, many Montrealers completely lost confidence in the willingness and even the ability of the Government of Canada to contribute in one way or another to the recovery of their region. For them as for a growing number of Quebecers, the Canadian Government was partly to blame for their economic decline. Instead of helping to find lasting solutions, it had become an integral part of the problem.

Out of this context, a new generation of entrepreneurs started to emerge. A new spirit then took hold of the Montreal community.

For all those who were actively involved in Montreal's recovery, it was obvious that the various social and economic interests and governments had to come up with some solid consensus on the priorities for action. Strong in their new dynamism but mindful of the hardships of the recession, the people of Montreal gradually regained confidence.

But four years ago, an essential ingredient for this new state of mind to lead to real economic recovery was lacking. This ingredient was a new attitude of the federal Government to the region. To break the vicious