

Canada—U.S. Free Trade Agreement

The Government has the opportunity to change that. We will bring in amendments to respond to that particular concern. All the Government has to do is to agree to them. It will not change the basic content of the agreement. It will not do damage to the agreement. But it will give an insurance policy to Canadians.

One can say the same thing about the adjustment programs. Here is an interesting observation, what I call watching the pinball theory of the Tories trying to pass the buck. When we talked about adjustment for workers the Prime Minister said: "Talk to the Minister of Trade and the Minister of Employment". The Minister of Trade and the Minister of Employment have said: "Well, you are going to be hearing from the Minister of Labour". We just heard from the Minister of Labour, who spent the sum total of 78 seconds dealing with the question of adjustment. That shows how deep set their concerns are for Canadian workers that the Minister managed 78 seconds of his total treatment of the subject on the record. The sum total of the Minister's remarks were: "Wait for my colleagues to talk about it somewhere further in the debate". They are just bouncing the ball around.

One reason that they have not yet 'fessed up to why the Government is not bringing in any new adjustment programs, and one of the reasons that the de Grandpré commission is in deep freeze is that they know that under this agreement adjustment programs will be challengeable by the United States Government. They are not prepared to admit to that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Fortunately, we have on the record the statement of a more honest interpreter of the agreement, Mr. Gordon Ritchie, the former deputy trade negotiator. In committee hearings last summer he admitted that adjustment programs are vulnerable and challengeable under the new U.S. trade law. That is the reason that the Government is dancing on its Gucci shoes all of a sudden. It knows that it does not have the power.

I say to the Minister of the homeless, who is responsible for keeping people freezing on the streets in downtown areas of Canada, if he has such a big mouth then let him put his money where his mouth is and put something in the legislation. Is he afraid? I challenge those two Ministers today, if they have any sense of honour or dignity then they have a way to live up to their word. Let them put something in the Bill.

We know what the answer will be on that one. We know that once again they are providing a smoke screen. It is a subterfuge. They will be passing the buck around from the de Grandpré commission, to the Ministers, to the private sector, all because they are once again showing their fear and trepidation of doing anything in this agreement that will raise the ire of our new American partners.

The same thing holds true for questions of the environment. The Minister cited Section 603 of the agreement which states that nothing will touch it. That section only talks about technical standards. It does not mention the environment at all. During the campaign, 93 environmental groups stated that this agreement represents the greatest threat to Canadian environmental standards. And is the Government responding in any fashion in terms of this legislation? Once again, for greater certainty, the reasonable approach to take would be to introduce an amendment stating that nothing in the agreement would affect the ability of the Canadian Government to provide for new laws in relation to the protection of the environment.

● (1230)

Is there any such clause in the legislation? No.

And, of course, we all know why none of the important guarantees of which I have spoken were included in the legislation. The fact is that this Government had the election bought for it by its friends in the business community, who realize that this trade agenda is only one small part of a much, much broader agenda, that being to put a strait-jacket on the Parliament of Canada, to put handcuffs on the Government of Canada to operate and effectively govern with the interests of ordinary Canadians in mind. This agreement results in a transfer of power out of the hands of the Parliament of Canada. That is the real agenda!

The real agenda of the Free Trade Agreement is part and parcel of a much larger movement aimed at restricting and eviscerating the ability of the federal Government to provide for responses to the concerns of ordinary Canadians, those who do not sit in the boardrooms of the country and who do not have available to them millions of dollars for high-priced, high-powered advertising programs. Ordinary Canadians can only rely upon the Parliament of Canada, rely upon their elected representatives, to reflect their concerns.

But, Mr. Speaker, we know that this Government is one that is not very much interested in the concerns or interests of ordinary Canadians. The Free Trade