

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

in those last two weeks of the election, attack the Liberal Party. It was a coalition of the Tories, big business and the New Democratic Party Leader.

It was hard to imagine that a Party which stood up day after day in the House saying it would oppose to its last breath the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement would, in the last three weeks of the election as it began to slip, turn its fire on Liberals. They forgot that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) was the proponent. They somehow forgot that it was the Conservatives who were the advocates of trade and spent all their time, advertising dollars and energy and resources attacking the Liberals. I say that with great regret because we felt that if there had been an effective coalition across the country we could have defeated the Conservatives and we would not be debating this Bill at the present time.

Mr. McDermid: It is all your fault, Steve.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): That saddens me deeply, Mr. Speaker. I want to say by way of personal reflection that I, like other Members in the House, have been intimately involved with this debate for close to four years. I think I speak for all Members of the House, both those who have just been elected and those who were here, that in a sense it has been a rare privilege to be involved in a debate of such historic proportions, win or lose. In some ways we have been serving in a very dramatic and historic way the reason why we are here.

Every one of us, whatever our differences, runs for public office because we feel we have something to offer.

An Hon. Member: Lloyd for leader.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): We know that what has transpired in this country in the past years and months has been something that has demanded the utmost commitment, engagement and involvement. It has required—I make an exception. The Minister of Youth does not have the ability to be committed or engaged. He does not understand what public service means. All he understands is how his job works. That is the limit of his understanding of himself. That is the problem with the Conservatives, and there are too many of them.

That kind of commitment which people have made has been broadly shared by millions of other Canadians. We have simply been their servants in a real way, active as their spokespersons. This has been a very important definition for Canadians. It has required thousands of

people to leave the comfort of their occupations and families and ask themselves some hard questions about what this country means.

This debate, as raucous as it gets and with as much rhetoric that has flourished, did require Canadians to come to grips with some very fundamental questions about who we are, what we are and where we are going. I think that sets the base for a continuing debate in this country.

Anyone who assumes that this third reading of the Bill ends the debate is sorely wrong. It just begins the debate. This has been a catharsis for Canadians. It has given Canadians a new perspective of what it means to be a Canadian. It has brought them to realize that we simply cannot let Parliament work in the abstract in some isolation on the Hill in Ottawa and that the only way we can govern is if people are directly involved and can participate.

In some ways that realization came too late. In part, the Tory strategy succeeded. For a long time they were able to keep this matter hidden in the shadows. The strategy that was elaborated in their Cabinet paper in 1985, clearly stated that the only way they could get the trade deal through was if they did not tell Canadians what was in it. The Minister of Trade says he does not like cucumbers but he certainly knows how to grow mushrooms, which is basically to throw the manure at them and keep them in the dark. That is what the Minister and his colleagues have been very capable of doing.

The doors opened with the election. We suddenly realized that something very important was happening. That is why we have been engaged in this debate as long as we have in this last week and why we felt we needed far more time. That is why we believe it was not simply a matter of turning this Parliament into a sausage machine that would process the votes according to some kind of automatic formula, but would provide a forum in which that thirst for understanding and demand by so many Canadians to know more about this deal could be satisfied.

We have been denied, and so have Canadians. I say as a veteran of this House that it strikes me as being sad, in a way, that we could go through the last few days seeing closure brought forward more often than it was during the famous pipeline debate which was called at the time of a crisis of parliamentary government in Canada. The Government has used closure more often for more