

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition)

“We in the Liberal Party have always favoured finding ways with the U.S. of enhancing access to each other’s markets.”

Concluding a free trade agreement would bring about profound changes in nearly all aspects of our economy in the years to come. It would have a considerable impact on our way of life, our trading habits, our national sovereignty, our independence and certainly on the quality of life in the northern part of this continent.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) has embarked upon a risky undertaking, and he is once again refusing to let us know the stakes involved. The Government has no mandate from Canadians to negotiate a free trade agreement. There was no mention of this during the election campaign, and in fact we would not even be discussing the matter here in the House, if the Opposition parties had not insisted on having this debate.

Canadians are giving a clear message to the Prime Minister. They are saying: “Mr. Prime Minister, would you deal honestly with us, would you give us the facts, would you give us the data upon which we can make judgments about the affairs of state and the issues before us?” I believe that if given the facts and if given an opportunity to assess those facts over a reasonable period of time, Canadians will make the right judgment. The gap in the process now before the country is that the Government does not trust Canadians, it is not

giving Canadians the facts and it is not allowing the people of Canada to make a fair judgment about what is going on.

Of course the United States is our largest and most important trading partner. In no way do I contest the emphasis the Prime Minister puts on those figures. Of course we should seek greater access to American markets as part of our over-all opening to the world. However, entering into these talks has been ill-timed. There is rising protectionist sentiments in the United States reflected in the newly elected Democratic Congress. There have been years of trade surpluses with the United States and we felt at the outset that this was not the best time to try to obtain a better over-all deal with the United States.

I think there is a question which needs to be put to the Government, with which the Government has not dealt, and we have put the question to Ministers and to the Prime Minister on other occasions. What is the real purpose of these negotiations on the American side? Reading the recently introduced amendments to the U.S. trade legislation, and particularly that piece of legislation now supported in a Democratic Senate by 53 or 54 Senators on both sides of the aisle, one observes that that legislation does not talk about free trade,