

to implement international accords affecting their jurisdictions. It is on the basis of that decision that Ontario lodged an appeal to the courts disputing the legitimacy of federal action in this matter.

• (1235)

I repeat that the Official Opposition approves the principles of NAFTA. Let me remind this House that Quebec was the strongest advocate of NAFTA and of the free trade agreement between Canada and the United States. During the 1988 election campaign, the Conservative Party used the free trade agreement to get votes in Quebec. With the support of the Parti québécois, the Conservatives were able to win a lot of seats in Quebec and thereby get a second straight mandate.

If Quebecers were so strongly in favour of free trade, it is because they understood that the future of a small and dynamic modern society such as ours is contingent upon being open to the world and having access to major markets. Far from advocating a rigid and inward-looking form of nationalism, Quebecers are confident in their ability, and they are ready to face international competition and conquer new markets.

The federal structure never allowed Quebec to fully affirm its autonomy and extend its jurisdiction to an international level. Quebec can no longer endure this situation which limits its possibilities; the failure of the Meech Lake Accord confirmed the dead end in which Canada put itself.

Let us not forget that Quebec was always willing to participate in federal-provincial consultations on NAFTA, and always strongly defended Quebecers' interests at those meetings. The terms and conditions relating to Quebec and Canada in the side agreements must take into account Quebec's legitimate wishes and reflect the jurisdictional realities that exist in Quebec and Canada. Under the 1867 Constitution, the Official Opposition will not approve any agreement before receiving assurances that Quebec's areas of jurisdiction will be respected.

Negotiations are under way between Quebec and Ottawa in order to implement the side agreements. The Official Opposition is keeping a close watch on these negotiations. It would be totally unacceptable for the federal government to take advantage of Quebec's agreement in principle to unilaterally impose its own environmental and labour standards, two areas in which Quebec is determined to maintain its prerogatives and its autonomy.

Quebec cannot be satisfied with a hasty consultation when issues affecting it so deeply will be discussed in committee. We

Government Orders

will soon find out whether the federal government's appetite for centralization will gain the upper hand once again.

So that is the position of the Bloc Québécois and Official Opposition.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, today I am speaking as chairman of the Reform Party committee on international trade.

The topic is Bill C-4 which will permit the full Canadian enforcement of two NAFTA side agreements: the North American agreement on environment co-operation and the North American agreement on labour co-operation.

I will begin my statement by saying that the Reform Party supports this bill, although we do have a few areas of concern that I will be expanding upon later in my presentation. Our support of NAFTA is on the condition that Canadian businesses can take full advantage of this important agreement by reducing government spending and lowering taxes in this country; by eliminating interprovincial trade barriers, and by shifting emphasis from welfare to retraining and technological development.

• (1240)

Because we support NAFTA we support the necessary enacting legislation introduced in Bill C-4. I would like to commend the government for signing NAFTA. I was encouraged in the throne speech by the promise of an activist trade policy and by improving access to export sales. I was especially encouraged by the promise to work with provincial governments to eliminate internal trade barriers.

Canada is a trading nation and benefits enormously from trade liberalization. Canada produces a surplus of many goods and services which are in demand around the world. Yet Canada cannot possibly produce the full range of goods and services that Canadians need so it is to our advantage that we maximize and optimize trade. Greater and freer world trade will open up new markets and new opportunities. It will provide more jobs, raise our real income levels and add to the strength of the Canadian economy. The overall prosperity of Canadians will be enhanced.

In Canada, trade accounts for one out of every four jobs generated. In my riding of Peace River we are very dependent on trade to provide jobs; in the agriculture sector, oil and gas, and also in forestry. Twenty-five per cent of everything we produce is exported and the total value of exports is increasing all the time.

This underlines the importance of participating in both NAFTA and the GATT trade agreements. The NAFTA agreement allows Canada to reach its long-term objectives and will