

*Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*

Mr. Speaker, if that approach is acceptable to Conservatives, it is neither acceptable to the New Democrats or to the Canadian people. We are saying no to this agreement because it will hurt people who are dear to us, men and women of this country. We are saying yes to Canadian men and women who want to carry on the Canadian tradition in a modern and humane way. We, New Democrats, are saying no to this Agreement because it threatens to ruin everything that is different, that is progressive in our country, Canada.

• (1830)

[English]

Our vision of Canada as a social democratic party is based on fairness for average Canadians and their families. We want a fair deal for the many, not a special deal for the few.

Our vision of Canada is rooted in what I believe has become a modern Canadian tradition of compassion and justice. It responds to the challenges of today but also reaches beyond to the challenges of tomorrow. Instead of rejecting the past, we want to build upon it. Instead of restricting the notions of liberty, equality and community, we want to expand them. Instead of marching backward, we look forward to the 21st century.

I say again to all those Canadians who have begun to watch this historic debate, we in my Party believe in a Canada where we work together with average Canadians for a future not of perfection but a future of fairness, whether we are thinking of lumber workers in British Columbia, office workers in our cities, the farmers in all of Canada, textile workers in Quebec, or women, whether they work in the home in the tradition of women in the past or are contemporary women who more often are working outside the home.

We believe that the concerns of these people, average people, ought to become the priority of government not one day of the week but the priority of governments day in and day out, week in and week out, all year long.

Our vision of Canada certainly embraces strongly our tradition as a trading nation. Our vision of Canada includes a strong but fair trading relationship with our largest trading partner, the United States.

Our vision of Canada encompasses enhanced trade with the world, with our traditional partners in the European Community and those in the Pacific Rim. Most of all, our vision of Canada goes beyond mere matters of trade. It retains Canada's sovereign ability to determine our own destiny here on this part of the continent, to ensure that Canadians retain control to make decisions about the kind of society we want and retains the control for our children to make the kinds of decisions that they want.

The Conservatives try to claim that Canadians must accept this deal or nothing. Having created a monster, they ridiculously ask: Is there anything better? Well, there are other options to enhanced trade that do remain pertinent to trade and trade alone.

I want to say something about those specific alternatives favoured by my Party. I begin by saying that any proposal for trade should be about trade alone and not entail the giving away of all those powers to create within Canada the kind of society we want. I said earlier that John Diefenbaker understood that as part of the 20th century and John A. Macdonald certainly understood that at the last part of the 19th century. I only wish there was some current Conservative leaders who understood their own Conservative tradition in this regard.

Our approach combines three fundamentals that are key to enhancing fairness for average Canadians and for future generations. They are new opportunities for Canadians at home, fair trade with the United States, and new global trading opportunities beyond this continent.

First, let me say something about the opportunities for Canadians here at home. We would institute a national conference on the economy. This would be a body which meets at least annually for a serious analysis and discussion of the Canadian economy. It would have a serious mandate. It would be made up of leading business people, trade unionists, and community representatives. Its role would be advisory, but it would be expected to make recommendations and have regular assessments of what was done with them.

I say frankly to the Prime Minister who is here with us in this debate that he began what I thought was a serious effort in this direction shortly after he was elected. He established a conference that brought together such representatives, in which they discussed the future of this country and made a number of sensible proposals. Then they were sent home and never heard from again.

I have talked to some of those people who were at that conference, including business people, trade unionists, and others who expected a follow-up conference. I suggest that any modern government, in a mixed economy, should begin with an approach, whether or not it is within a federal state, that receives advice from such people in the private sector. It should be prepared to listen and systematically have a dialogue, with the Government retaining the final responsibility of making a decision. Such people should not be brought together simply for show, then sent home and ignored.

Second, we would upgrade our industrial potential at the national level by doubling our commitment to research and development and strengthening our capacity for technological innovation.