

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

Of course, the most fundamental change will come if the agreement is implemented. However, it will also be the case that, if the agreement is not implemented, the debate which we have had, and the efforts which the Government has made to bring about this agreement, will have a lasting effect on the political process. It will have defined people's positions on various things for many years to come. Therefore, regardless of how it finally turns out, we are at the end of a very historic political debate.

One of the things that has bothered me about this debate all along, and tonight is no different, is that there has been an unwillingness on the part of the people who promote the agreement to hear what the other side is saying, and to at least acknowledge the legitimate differences of view that exist about Canada.

In his opening words tonight, I heard the Parliamentary Secretary say that he respected many of the concerns held by Canadians who are critics of the agreement. Yet I must say that I have listened to the Parliamentary Secretary and to the Minister for International Trade (Mr. Crosbie), on many occasions in the House and outside, and I have yet to find one criticism that has been made of the free trade agreement for which they have shown any respect. Criticism after criticism, and concern after concern has been trivialized and caricatured. People who have raised these concerns or criticisms have been accused of everything from verbal terrorism to criminal negligence, you name it.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, where is that respect? I also ask not only the Government, but all of us here, the media, and everybody who has participated, why have we not been able—and I have seen it before in the House during the debate on the Constitution in 1981—to get to the root of what it is we are actually disagreeing about?

I suppose part of it is the inarticulateness of the political process. I also think it is a tactical refusal on the part of the Government to admit all of what is involved in this agreement. We saw it again tonight when the Parliamentary Secretary rose and talked about the elimination of tariffs. I have said it time and time again until I am tired of saying it, but I only have one more time to say it: this agreement is not only about the elimination of tariffs. If it were only about the elimination of tariffs, we would have an entirely different debate. It is either a manifestation of the profoundest ignorance for Members on the Government side to keep rising and talking about this agreement as if it only had to do with the elimination of tariffs, or it is a manifestation of the profoundest deceit. It is one or the other. I think there is a mixture over there. I think some are just ignorant, and some are deceitful.

What we have in the agreement is a lot more than the elimination of tariffs. Why does the Parliamentary Secretary and others not rise and talk about that? Why do they not talk about the provisions with respect to foreign investment? Why do they not talk about the provisions with respect to energy? Why do they not talk in the honest way that ex-Premier Lougheed did when he appeared before the committee and stated that this would enable policy to be set in Washington rather than Ottawa, and that he thought that was a good idea?

Why do they not talk about financial services and other things that are involved in the agreement? Why is it that we only hear about tariffs? Why is it that we only hear about this one part of the agreement?

I say to you, Madam Speaker, that one of the enduring frustrations of this debate, for those of us who are against it, is trying to get the Government to admit, and the Canadian people to see, that what we are talking about here is something much more than what has ever been considered historically as free trade. Free trade never involved all those things, and that it is on the basis of those other sections of the agreement, having to do with energy, foreign investment, services, and the agreement to agree, over the next five to seven years on what constitutes a subsidy or an unfair trade practice that is the source of our anxiety about this agreement.

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Would it not be nice if someone had just admitted, just once, that in those negotiations that will take place over the next five to seven years there will be attempts by the Americans to draw our social programs into the negotiations regarding what constitutes a subsidy? Does anybody on the other side actually believe that the Americans will not try that, that that will not become an object of negotiation? If the Government is successful in negotiating in such a way that our programs do not come to be seen that way, that will be terrific. We doubt that that may be the case because of the asymmetrical relationship that exists between Canada and the United States, but our first and foundational claim is that these things will be negotiated, that these things will be on the table, no matter what the outcome of the negotiation is.

Our first and foundational claim regarding that is that those kinds of things should not be on the table and that no Canadian government has any business entering into an agreement that provided for a process over the next five to seven years whereby those things would be on any table. As far as we are concerned in the NDP, those things belong on the Canadian table alone, they belong here in the House of Commons, and not on a table between an American negotiator and a Canadian negotiator, either in Washington or in Ottawa.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Blaikie: Could not anybody at least have admitted that that is something that is going to take place regardless of the outcome?

I have asked myself the question I do not know how many times. I look over there and I see people whom I have worked with for nine and a half years now, and I ask myself, how is it that they could contemplate doing something which, in my judgment, and in the judgment of my colleagues and of many Canadians, is so detrimental to the survival of the kind of Canada that the Conservatives, one after the other, have risen to say that they love? I have asked myself why it is that so many can get up and demonstrate so much zeal, joy, delight in this agreement. I have finally come to the conclusion that this debate in many, many ways has had absolutely nothing to do with facts or economic analysis, because economists are a dime a dozen.