

Government Orders

• (1620)

If Canada is prepared to acknowledge that harmonization of the legislation of our two countries is mutually beneficial, why should we be more reasonable with the Americans than with a sovereign Quebec, if it benefits our citizens? Personally, I think that the day after a declaration of sovereignty, the United States and the rest of Canada will sit down at the same table and will want to negotiate.

Quebec's production figures are four times those of Chile, which is expected to be the next country to sign NAFTA. Four times. Quebec's trade with the United States is eight times what it is with Brazil, Argentina and Chile combined. Canada tells us: "We are willing to let Chile become a member tomorrow morning", but they are not prepared to do the same for Quebec. Yet Quebec has eight times the trade exchanges with these three countries combined.

The American president has already stated, as I have already said, that he wanted to create a free trade zone from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, which I imagine includes Quebec. He did not say "a free trade zone from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego excluding Quebec". That is not what he said. What he did say is that it is to everyone's advantage in this great economic space in which we live to liberalize trade. Some governors of northeastern states have already announced their firm intention to continue trade relations with a sovereign Quebec. Laurent Beaudoin is not the only one who has made a statement.

The government of Canada strongly supports Chile's application, as I have already said, and yet Chile has 148 times less trade with English Canada than Quebec has with English Canada. This is a key point. Another country like Chile would be accepted, yet Quebec, with 148 times more trade links than Chile, would be rejected. That makes absolutely no sense. Nothing but bogey man scare tactics. We will not stand for such a thing.

During a trade visit to South America, the Prime Minister of Canada made a strong and convincing plea in favour of broadening NAFTA to include all of the Americas. There is, however, a lack of logic in the no side which they are not prepared to acknowledge. Again this week, Mr. Martin has made himself the spokesman for the no side with respect to NAFTA. Yesterday in a speech to the Association professionnelle en développement économique du Québec, he raised three key points preventing Quebec from joining NAFTA quickly.

First, membership in the World Trade Association. With respect to this point, I must tell Mr. Martin that he is wrong, although I cannot tell whether or not his error is deliberate. I do not believe so, I think he might be acting in good faith, but it is obvious that he is in error. True, it could take several years for a country to conform to the World Trade Organization's rules before being accepted for membership. But he must acknowl-

edge at the same time that Quebec already meets all of the World Trade Organization's membership requirements. WTO rules contain provisions for accelerating the process for countries that are already in compliance with the rules.

Quebec would certainly have access to this fast track, which takes about two to three months. In the past five years, the latest countries to declare sovereignty or independence were all recognized immediately by the WTO. Perhaps one or two countries have still not yet been accepted, because they do not meet the basic requirements, because they were not part of a free market economy. That is why the delay. However, a sovereign Quebec, which already satisfies all the conditions, could join the organization quickly—within two or three months, and not two or three years, as Mr. Martin suggests. Even the Czechs and the Slovaks have had the advantage—

• (1625)

The Deputy Speaker: I would ask the member to use the minister's title and not his surname.

Mr. Laurin: You are right, Mr. Speaker. I should have said "the Minister of Finance".

Even the Czech and the Slovak republics, which have just achieved sovereignty, have had the advantage of this accelerated process, the process of joining the World Trade Organization, despite the fact that their economies were far less developed than Quebec's.

The Minister of Finance also contended that Quebec will not be able to sign NAFTA before achieving sovereignty, which, according to him, would take time. However, Quebec retains its legal status, so long as it remains a province of Canada, in my opinion and according to all the experts. As a province and so long as it has not declared its sovereignty, Quebec remains a party to NAFTA.

When we come to declare our sovereignty, we will have had time to talk with people. We will continue to be a party to NAFTA as a Canadian province, and the day after sovereignty, negotiations will be complete, and we will become another member of NAFTA, this time, not as a province, but as a sovereign country. His reasoning falls short here again.

The Minister of Finance raised a third point. He ignored an aspect of the international reality and existing practice, in stating that the American Congress was not keen at the prospect of new negotiations. The Americans have never behaved this way, because state successions promote the continuity and stability of international treaties.

If the United States ever did ignore this rule, it would be to Canada's full advantage to sign a partnership with Quebec, without altering the economic reality of Canada and Quebec, but permitting continued membership by Canada and Quebec in NAFTA, as provided in article 22.04 of the treaty.