

II. DEFINITION AND AWARENESS

A. Meaning of Free Trade

A plurality in both groups had heard something about the ongoing negotiations; however, none were capable of distinguishing the dominant issues, except mentioning the roles played by Prime Minister Mulroney and President Reagan. Many group participants expressed a belief that Mr. Mulroney was a "neophyte," and easily manipulated by Ronald Reagan. Virtually no one could name the key negotiators or political spokespersons for both Canada and the U.S. in the negotiations.

Free trade, for those who held an opinion on it, was variously seen as a plan to: "abolish the borders between the two countries," "remove the quotas," "sell out Canada," "eliminate all export/import restrictions between the two countries," "eliminate import taxes," and "establish a type of EEC."

The majority had never heard about the talks, but tended to subscribe to the overall mildly negative impressions generated by those who had. Almost everyone believed that the issue was something that ordinary folks had very little say in, with a frequent comment being, "who cares what we think." The issue was also considered to be much too complex for most Canadians and very few were interested in such matters. The minority who claimed to be following the talks said they did so for various reasons, such as: "I believe it will imperil Quebec's cultural identity"; "The talks are going much too fast, for such a complex arrangements should take 5-to-10 years in order to get all the interested parties involved"; and "Although I follow the news, I don't really follow the talks because they are a political issue, and I'm not interested in politics."

Among those who claim to be following the talks or have demonstrated some awareness of them, many were frustrated by the lack of what they call "real" information about them. What they indicated as the type of questions they would like to have answered were the following:

- o What are the issues on the agenda?
- o What does Canada want?
- o What does the United States want?