

*Free Trade*

and a matter of undying concern for all Canadians. She then proceeded to give a speech that would be more reminiscent of a late night barroom brawl than the kind of elocution that might try to give Canadians a sense of purpose, direction and vision of where we are going. That is not surprising because I think the entire treatment of this matter from the time it was announced has been shrouded in secrecy, has been riddled with contradiction and has been tainted with this kind of low-life attitude that we are all right and we do not care what anybody else thinks.

If we describe the process that we have been through, it is more like a shotgun wedding. Consummation before you get to the altar, a hurry-up, gun-at-your-head-signing kind of arrangement and no willingness to deal with the consequences of your act.

**Mr. McDermid:** That is nonsense.

**Mr. Axworthy:** We talk about the national interest. I believe that one of the primary issues of the national interest is to ensure that we retain a respect for the democratic institutions of this country, that we retain a respect for the rights of Canadians to participate, to be informed, to have information and, particularly, to be heard.

There has been nothing since this initiative was launched to serve the national interest in strengthening peoples belief or credit in the parliamentary institutions. This institution has been treated with contempt and disdain. It has been ignored, short-circuited simply for the reasons of reaching a political public relations timetable. When the Minister says it is historic, it is historic in the way in which this Government has deliberately gone out of its way to bypass the fundamental institutions of Canada ensuring people have a right to participate.

• (1200)

Just take this morning as an example. Today a Commons committee was to table a report outlining its findings on what Canadians thought about the original document, but the Government has already decided on a final document so all those representations will have absolutely no relevance or impact whatsoever on what the Government will do. Is that not an attitude of cynicism about the way this institution works?

Let us take into account that, contrary to all promises and assurances, the final document contains within it major substantial changes to the agreement, changes affecting the rights of provinces, the right to establish Crown corporations, the control of the entire resource industry of Canada, transportation and agriculture. In other words, it is "Document II", it is not simply a legal redefinition. It was a fundamental alteration. Yet we are now entering into a debate of some few days' length in which the Conservatives will use their overwhelming majority to ram the agreement through so that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) will have a so-called mandate to sign the agreement on January 2 without allowing Canadians the opportunity to have had the final document put before

a parliamentary forum in which examination, review and debate could take place.

Is that in the national interest? Is it in the national interest for the Government to treat Parliament so blindly that it will create nothing but disrespect for how this institution works or how it should work? Of course, the Minister is so deeply interested in this historic debate she has not managed to stay for two seconds after her own presentation.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski):** The Hon. Member who has been here for many years knows that he should not reflect on the attendance of Hon. Members. There are television cameras in the lobbies for Members to watch. I believe the Hon. Minister will probably be back in the Chamber, but I do not think that that type of debate is necessary.

**Mr. Axworthy:** Mr. Speaker, I thought it might be nice if any Minister at all were in the House. I apologize if I trespassed, against the House's rules. I only made that remark to illustrate just how important it really is when we are not even able to have a presence on the front-bench. I withdraw that remark also, but I think it is important to recognize just how this matter is being treated by Members on the government side.

The process was begun in an atmosphere of distrust. A candidate for the role of leader of his Party said with no equivocation that he would never sign a free trade deal because it would destroy Canadian sovereignty. That was a statement made by Mr. Brian Mulroney, private citizen, before he became Leader of the Conservative Party. In that same leadership campaign I recall hearing the words of the now Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson), the now Secretary of State (Mr. Crombie) and the now Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark), all of whom declared without any qualification that they would never initiate a free trade deal with the United States. Why? Because it would destroy our sovereignty.

How times have changed. There they sit now, ball on nose, clapping their flippers wildly for the concept that free trade is the biggest bonanza to hit Canada and will not affect sovereignty at all. That is not honest. It is not honest for the Prime Minister to have said he was absolutely sure he would never sign such an agreement and now say that he thinks it is the greatest thing without giving us any reason whatsoever for changing his mind.

What happened? That is an interesting question. What happened on the road to Damascus that caused Saul to change to Paul so suddenly? Once we saw the Prime Minister in action in the beginning of 1984 we realized that he changed his mind on everything. Unfortunately, this issue has an awful lot more impact on Canadians than most of his other gymnastic flip-flops have had.

I am not here to describe the mental acrobatics of the Prime Minister. God knows we have seen enough of that. I am