

Free trade: Where will our jobs be? Texas?

by Kathleen Beechinor

Free trade. Is it a bold, bright future for those of us about to pursue careers in our chosen fields?

"It's the infancy of totalitarianism," says NDP Education critic Jim Gurnett, who feels that its effects, on small business, labor and people entering the work force are not being considered.

"The term 'free trade' is a slogan that's being thrown around loosely. It's far too simplistic and there is likely to be a whole web of interconnected problems as a result," says Gurnett.

He further maintains that the issue is an exercise of PC fast shuffling in that people are being pushed to take stand without having a complete understanding of what is at stake.

Gurnett feels that it's the federal government's intention to work out actual policies concerning the agreement after they attain the support they are seeking.

MP for Edmonton South Jim Edwards claims, "The NDP has been trying to create a bogey — a fear of free trade."

"I believe that freer trade could lead to a 10 to 12 percent expansion in our economy," said Edwards, although he admitted earlier that he had not actually had a chance to read the MacDonald Commission's

recommendation yet as it is still sitting on his desk in Ottawa.

The federal government's purpose — in an effort to reduce the deficit — is to raise Canadian production standards through competition with the U.S.

Economic theory says a free trade agreement between Canada and the U.S. will result in a higher GNP for the continent as a whole.

However, a higher GNP will not necessarily be distributed to the advantage of the Great White North and some speculate that Canada will be hurt in order that the U.S. may prosper.

There is also dissonance on how much, if any expansion — can be expected.

Dr. E. Shafer of the Economics department feels Edwards speculation on a 10 to 12 percent expansion is way off target.

"No way, period. I don't know where he got that, he is like a magician pulling a figure out of a hat. He does not even specify if that means a loss not an expansion."

"The large corporations are already multinational and free trade will only benefit big business," says Gurnett. "The people who are promoting free trade are unprincipled."

Dr. Garth Stevenson of the political science department clarifies

the situation: "Free exchange of trade does not mean the exchange of capital or the freedom for Canadians to pursue employment opportunities in the U.S."

There is apprehension regarding the very real possibility that industry and jobs will become centered in the Southern United States where labor and production is cheap. When this happens, the federal government may well be inclined to open Canada right up, eventually incapacitating our country as a sovereign state.

"It will begin with free trade and then carry over to other things,"

warns Gurnett.

"They're saying that we're going to sacrifice things like medicare and family allowance," says Edwards, "when we've already said that the Canadian social benefit system is not negotiable."

If this is so, where lurks the big bogey in the proposed free trade agreement?

"I'm not opposed to liberal trade," says Gurnett, "but it should be multilateral, sectoral, and it should be realistic."

He pointed out, as an example, that when pension funds are set up, never more than 2 or 3 percent is

held by any one bank. One would not set up a fund with only one institution because it could go the way of the Canadian Commercial Bank.

"Canada, along with other countries, should be pursuing an internationalist position," Gurnett says. "The more we pursue free trade, the more we are culturally isolated."

Edwards believes that a decision on the agreement must be enacted within the next 60 to 90 days if it is to happen with minimal hindrance from the Opposition.

"President Reagan is behind us all the way," he said.



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