

Over the years, Canada has built up one of the most advanced social systems in the world. This to its mind is the sign of a society committed to reducing inequalities, a society where compassion is a major factor.

The American society, for reasons of its own which are not for us to discuss here, chose another road. It would be highly naive to be ignorant of what our Canadian values are, to believe the signing of a trade agreement with the United States implies that Canada would adhere to the Americans' social standards.

Our social programs are here to stay. And I challenge anyone among our friends opposite or our friends anywhere to show that the free trade agreement will be the end of any social program.

No provision in the treaty requires Canada to harmonize its economical or social policies with those in the United States.

Since 1935, Canada and the United States have been gradually reducing their mutual tariffs by 72 per cent. In the meantime, our social policy has evolved in a way that is quite different from that in the United States. Why should the total elimination of tariffs force us to do away with it?

By the same token, the reduction of tariff barriers did not impede Canada from promoting bilingualism and multiculturalism.

Our programs in such areas as Medicare, Old Age Security pensions, family allowances and unemployment insurance have never been on the table.

Moreover, American fishermen who felt that the unemployment insurance benefits paid to their Canadian counterparts were concealed subsidies saw their claims turned down by the US Department of Commerce.

The additional wealth resulting from the free trade agreement remains in fact the best assurance for the maintenance and development of our social programs. The economic stagnation and protectionism suggested by free trade opponents would be the best way to jeopardize our social gains.

Our Canadian identity cannot flourish in isolation, Mr. Speaker; it cannot be the result of artificial barriers. It will result from a world-oriented stronger economy, to the advantage of regional development.

I strongly urge all Quebecers and other Canadians to be suspicious of all the prophets of doom and gloom who suggest that Canada will be swallowed by its huge neighbour. The Free Trade Agreement is a major step towards the achievement of the Canadian national goal. It is also the affirmation of our country's global role. Our relations with our neighbour to the South should increasingly become more responsible and adult. Fear and unwillingness to face facts would lead us nowhere. The United States are our natural partner. We cannot overlook the benefits which we could and should gain from this free trade agreement.

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

The surest sign of Canadian maturity is the support already given to the Free Trade Agreement, a support which proves Canadians are no longer afraid of competition, that they have gotten rid of their inferiority complex towards the United States and that they are determined to get their share of the North American economy.

Mr. Speaker, more than a trade issue this will have an impact on the very future of this country, something which could motivate people into correcting shortcomings and help Canada achieve the place it deserves among nations.

● (2010)

[English]

Mr. James: Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate the Hon. Member for Lac-Saint-Jean (Mr. Bouchard) on his maiden speech and especially on his thoughts on this very important agreement. I want to bring to his attention the area of petrochemicals which he mentioned and ask his thoughts on it. I would like to refer to a recent speech made by Thomas d'Aquino, the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Business Council on National Issues. He talks about myths and reality. He said:

Here the myth becomes even more fantastic, especially when we count the many precise ways in which access to the United States market is either improved or made more secure by the Agreement. Take the case, for example, of where access is improved. Virtually all tariffs on trade will be removed over a 10-year period. Precise rules of origin will help clarify uncertainties at border crossings. Customer user fees will be abandoned by the United States by 1994. Except where the Agreement provides otherwise, the right of national treatment will ensure that the United States will not discriminate against Canadian producers. Steps are taken to reduce or inhibit the establishment of non-tariff barriers such as discriminatory product standards and product approval requirements. Tariffs and quotas on all agricultural goods, except for quotas in support of supply management schemes, will be removed.

Access to government procurement markets will be expanded. Rules of origin offer more protection against offshore parts producers thereby giving increased reciprocal access to Canadian and American producers. A significant number of service industries will benefit because of the provisions dealing with the right of establishment and the principle of national treatment. Temporary entry for Canadian business people and service personnel is facilitated.

I know that the Province of Quebec is interested in furthering its petrochemical industry. With regard to tariff removal in particular, Polysar said:

It is Polysar's considered opinion that the recently negotiated free trade agreement with the U.S. will provide significant benefits and opportunities for all Canadians.

In our case we believe the removal of chemical tariffs over the next five years is a key element. Recently we have been considering reopening a plant to produce styrene that has been shut down since 1981, and the removal of tariffs could have an immediate impact on that project. The elimination of the 7.4 per cent duty on styrene would improve the Company's profit margin on the commodity by 2.5 cents for every pound sold. If the plant is reopened, the 100,000 ton of styrene would all be exported, largely to the U.S., leading to an improvement in profits of \$5 to \$10 annually.

What have the key executives and workers in the petrochemical industry in the Province of Quebec said to the