

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

What we stand for is proceeding within and with the international community. We want to do it that way because, as I mentioned, the relation of forces in this type of trade deal as proposed by the Government puts us at a disadvantage. The American economy is 10 times larger than ours. When you hear talk about harmonization of laws or harmonization of standards, as in the case of pesticides, to quote a minute example, where we would be working toward equivalent guidelines, the bigger will not make an effort to adjust and harmonize with the smaller. That simply does not happen. It is the smaller that has to adjust and harmonize with the bigger. We do not want to see that happening, particularly when it comes to harmonization, as I mentioned earlier, of the environmental standards and regulations and laws, particularly incentives that might be given to industries in order to clean up their act, which could be interpreted as incentives to industry itself to produce more and better in competition with American firms. Again, that is a big item.

We want to retain our sovereignty and economic independence and not be isolated within the North American geography. This is why we think we have enormous arguments to put forward as an alternative approach to Canadians if an election is called. We will ask Canadians to judge. We will ask Canadians to make a choice in the full knowledge of what is at stake here. The values that I and many others have spoken about is an important factor which is not stressed often enough, that this agreement, this Bill, is more than just trade in the long term. It will affect our energy and our security. We are giving up long-term security, no matter how funny the Member for Crowfoot finds this.

Mr. Malone: Ridiculous.

Mr. Caccia: There is more at stake than just trade, because we will give up our political decision-making powers. We will also be giving up the edge that we have on energy by virtue of the fact that we will have to give up the two energy pricing policies that we have used, and quite successfully for very good reasons.

In the process, we will be less like us and more like them, as John Trent put it so well in a speech at the University of Trent, when he said:

"We have declared it is not just what is on the table that counts but the probable after-effects of a trade deal, when Canadian corporations pressure the Government to lower corporate taxes, to lower social benefits and public health payments, and minimum salaries and union rights so that they can compete on a level playing field with the American counterparts."

This is what John Trent said on November 3, 1987, when he appeared before the committee.

What is this level playing field that has been bandied around so cleverly by several people, by several speakers, during this debate? The question being asked is: "A level playing field or an empty field" by a well known columnist, Leonard Shifrin, who wrote in the *Toronto Star* last October:

"On day one of a free-trade arrangement, certainly no objections would be registered to Canada's pension programs, its medicare system, maternity benefits, or whatever. Even years down the road, no objections should be

expected—as long as Canadian companies are being beaten in the marketplace. It will be only if we are winning that our "trade distorting" social practices will be diagnosed as the reason . . . One by one the measures that have defined our national community would be stripped bare as Canada's playing field was emptied of the offending provisions and made level with the U.S. plain . . ."

This is put well and effectively. To add to those two analyses, as I have said, by a university academician and a writer and columnist, you have the input by Margaret Atwood, which I thought was so punchy, so well put, when she appeared before the Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade last September. It may not have been read in detail, as the Parliamentary Secretary says. He may be quite right. You do not have to read it unless you are the Minister for International Trade responsible for negotiating it. The average Canadian does not have to read it in detail. They can catch the sense and the direction and the values at stake here in order to express a comment. You do not have to know it all in detail. That is the responsibility of the Minister.

Margaret Atwood wrote, and I will conclude on that:

"Canadian people, like people everywhere, have values other than money that are important to them. Their fears of losing these values are real fears, by which I mean that they are truly held and must be addressed. It is no use claiming that there is some mysterious gene of Canadianness welded into us at conception that will guarantee the retention of these values, even if all the social structures, educational underpinnings, and cultural manifestations of them disappear. What will be done, if anything, to give these values a fighting chance of surviving?"

. . . It is no use saying that these are emotional arguments as if that disqualifies them.

Almost all of the arguments heard so far in this debate have been emotional arguments. Fear is an emotion, yes, and love of country is an emotion; but greed is an emotion too."

That is how Margaret Atwood concluded her remarks.

● (1210)

Mr. McDermid: Mr. Speaker, does the Hon. Member not agree with two statements that I will now put on the record? First:

"The Canadian nation is not a weak and fragile plant doomed to disappear merely because we trade more freely and securely with our American neighbour. Free trade will reduce regional divisions and enhance Canadian confidence."

The second statement is:

"We cannot choose to cut back significantly our trading integration with the United States without risking severe economic dislocation, cessation of economic growth, and a resultant political instability. In the longer term, successful competition in a North American context will lead to a greater ability to compete abroad and diversify our markets."

Those two comments came from a commission which the Hon. Member's Government set up back when he was a Minister. They are from the Macdonald Commission on the Economy of Canada Report which highly recommended that we get into the trade negotiations with the United States. Very clear and concise statements were in the report on Canada's economy over a three-year period. If the Hon. Member does not agree with those statements, can he tell me why?