

Government Orders

Engaging in a phoney war in an attempt to make political hay on misplaced fears and insecurities will backfire in the face of the facts and the only thing that will get butted, to use the expression of the NDP leader, is the purveyors of such distorted logic.

The window of opportunity today is momentarily open. Let us go ahead and use the solid agreement that we have, as well as the assurance and the confidence flowing from this new trilateral partnership, and also our own strength and our own ability as Canadians to face new challenges as well or better than anyone else in the world.

• (1655)

My colleague, the Minister for International Trade, demonstrated on several occasions in this House that the economic recovery and the current growth are the results of our exports. Yet these people would still want to isolate Canada, put up smoke-screens around our country and keep us here because, according to them, we are not good enough to be competitive.

[*English*]

We are not good enough to compete. We are not trained enough. We are not trainable. We should stay here. The island of Canada should close itself to the world. That message of our friends on the other side is a great misunderstanding of the Canadian population.

Canadians are a hard working people who have faced many challenges in the past. We were able to meet those challenges because we were there. We did not shy away from the challenge. I know that for business, labour and all those communities across Canada that want to move forward the North American free trade agreement will be a great success.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Madam Speaker, let me say first that if this was not such a sad and shameful day in the history of this country I would be amused by the hon. minister's remarks.

This is a minister who says that things are coming up roses in Canada but as minister of employment does not acknowledge that there are 1.6 million Canadians unemployed. Next to Spain, that is the highest unemployment rate in the entire OECD community. He says: "Look, it is all these phantom fears that are out there. People are happy. They are thrilled at the opportunities being

provided by this government under the free trade agreements".

The fact of the matter is there is not a household in this country that has not been severely injured and hurt by the policies of this government. It is the highest unemployment rate in the OECD world. Of course the problem is that we have ministers of the Crown who do not understand that. They never talk about it. It does not exist for them. What did the minister say? He said: "It is a smoke-screen out there".

There is no understanding of the real issue which is that people want to work. They want to do so with a certain sense of dignity and honour. This is what the debate is really about. It is giving those people a voice, trying as hard as we might to ensure they can be heard and to break through the wall and cloak of silence that has been put upon them by this government.

Madam Speaker, do you realize that with the vote this afternoon closure has been used in this House 25 times since 1988? That equals the number of times closure was used from 1913 to 1988. In four years this government has used closure more often than all the other governments going back to 1913.

That is a direct demonstration of the kind of disdain the Minister for International Trade and his colleagues have for the Canadian people. They do not want to give them a chance to be heard. They do not want to hear a dialogue or a debate. They simply want to close the door so that they cannot hear the real voice of the Canadian people. The real voice is saying that these kinds of arrangements concocted in the back rooms, in the wealthy eating clubs the Minister for International Trade frequents, are not working in the interest of Canadians. They are not working in the interests of other working people around this continent.

• (1700)

I found it interesting when I went back and read the remarks of the trade minister. It was fascinating how he attempted with all the skill of his public relations manipulators to try to put a gloss on what has been taking place. He said that exports in 1992 reached a record high of \$157 billion. What he did not say was that imports also reached a record high. In fact our global trade surplus in 1992 is the smallest going back to 1981.