

In May, we appointed a Special Co-ordinator for Market Access Consultations, Mr. Tom Burns, former President of the Canadian Export Association. Mr. Burns and his team have met with close to 100 different associations and companies.

We also consulted provincial governments, first at the February conference of first ministers, and then in May at a meeting of federal and provincial trade ministers in Vancouver. Another meeting of trade ministers is being held today in Halifax, and trade issues will be on the agenda again when first ministers meet next month.

A Special Joint Committee of Parliament held public hearings through the summer on Canada-US trade. We want more debate in Parliament, and more consultations in the country.

We are establishing immediately a permanent International Trade Advisory Committee, to provide a constant two-way flow of information and advice between the government and the private sector on international trade matters.

The Committee will be chaired by Mr. Walter Light, past President and Chief Executive Officer of Northern Telecom. Feeding into the Committee will be more than 20 sectoral committees, comprising representatives of business, labour, consumers, cultural industries, agriculture, academics and research organizations.

This is the most wide open negotiating process in the history of Canada. The only way to ensure success is to have our negotiators knowing, firsthand, the impact of any proposals.

What the government has done so far is to invite the United States to begin negotiations on trade between the two countries. There may be no negotiations, if Congress refuses to consider arrangements which would limit its power to threaten Canada with protectionist bills. And if the negotiations begin, they may come to nothing if Washington demands a price which we are not prepared to pay. But we believe we can strike a deal that would be good for Canada. We have no illusions, however, and we know Americans will be hard bargainers. If we cannot strike a deal that would benefit all of Canada, we will strike no deal at all.

There will be commercial negotiations between two distinct and sovereign countries, whose intelligent co-operation can create more jobs, more growth and more economic security on both sides of the 49th parallel. The economic advantages of freer trade are undeniable. But we all know that modern nations are more than economic. The challenge will be to strengthen our economy and our sovereignty.

As the Prime Minister said when announcing in the House of Commons the government's intention to pursue a trade agreement with the United States, "our political sovereignty, our system of social programs, our commitment to fight regional disparities, our unique cultural identity, our special linguistic character — these are the essence of Canada. They are not at issue in these negotiations".

So, we will not be discussing Canadian medicare, or unemployment insurance, or bilingualism, or the

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