

section 612, which is entitled "Trade relations with Canada". Incidentally, we are the only country singled out in this act for specific comment. That section provides:

It is the sense of the Congress that the United States should enter into a trade agreement with Canada which will guarantee continued stability to the economies of the United States and Canada. In order to promote such economic stability, the President may initiate negotiations for a trade agreement with Canada to establish a free trade area covering the United States and Canada.

We know where the United States Congress stands with regard to free trade with Canada. What we do not know is where our own government stands with respect to such free trade. That is why we are having this debate today—in the earnest hope that perhaps we in this House will hear about some of the policies and some of the thrusts the government hopes to take in Geneva. It is strange that private negotiations are going on in Geneva in which the Americans have empowered their negotiators to enter into free trade with Canada, yet the Trudeau administration has given no indication of how it intends to deal with this important issue.

The concept of free trade is not new in Canada. The most recent advocate of such an agreement was the Economic Council of Canada which produced a report entitled "Looking Ahead". I presume most hon. members have read it. That report was produced more than a year ago, yet we who are vitally affected by this question must wait on the sidelines while the government stalls, sits silently and, presumably, searches for a policy with respect to free trade and the trade policy Canada should be following. The question of free trade is too important to be left to one party, or even to one government. The magnitude of a decision of this kind is too great. The fact is that we need nothing less than an ongoing discussion between the people and those who negotiate on their behalf.

Let us look at the American approach with respect to international trade, and how their approach differs from ours. As I have stated, in the United States the President is empowered to enter into actual trade negotiations not only with respect to the GATT negotiations but to secure a free trade area with Canada. In that context, however, we find that the president is instructed by Congress to appoint an advisory committee to deal with trade negotiations. This is mandatory, Mr. Speaker. The committee is to include representatives of government, labour, industry, agriculture, small businesses, service industries, retailers, consumer interests and the general public.

● (1520)

What do we have in Canada, that is similar to this advisory committee, to enter into the type of negotiations our government has entered into in Geneva? We have Donald Macdonald in Ottawa, Rodney Grey in Geneva, and a silent band of seven. In these gentlemen we may have the best negotiators in the world, but surely they should not be working in such splendid isolation. I suggest this is akin to a lawyer taking a case and refusing to see his client. Believing he knows best, he wants to work on the case alone, with a free hand, totally ignoring that what he negotiates might not be suitable to his client. To date,

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the government has been silent on our position at Geneva. Deals are being made, and we know that; but there is little review or discussion with those who would be most affected, the farmer, the miner, the logger, the manufacturer, and the consumer. How strange that we should learn, not from our own government but from the Americans, that there is a Canada-United States free trade proposition now being discussed in Geneva.

American trade negotiations began with Congress passing the trade act to which I have referred. As I have stated, this legislation sets out their approach to trade and authorizes negotiations. Let us remember, Mr. Speaker, that when the President of the United States enters into such negotiations on behalf of that country, he must consult with committees in both the Senate and the House of Representatives before entering into any trade agreement which provides for the reduction or elimination of a barrier to international trade.

Mr. Speaker, do we hear the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), or the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, proposing any reference to our standing committees so that we may review the trade policy of this nation, or that we may review such things as current international monetary conditions? The answer is no, we do not. On the other hand, the Americans, by an act which they passed, require public hearings; and they also require the President to establish the advisory committee to which I have referred which is made up of representatives of every sector of the economy.

There is no similar approach in Canada, yet millions of Canadian jobs, Canadian prices and the future of our economy may be affected by a simple order in council under the authority of section 10 of the Customs Tariff Act. All we know about it in this parliament is when the accomplished fact is presented, without debate and without any real, prior consultation. When I discussed this matter with a businessman, he said, "It is a terrible feeling to know I might be wiped out by an agreement in Geneva, not only without any change to state my views, but I will not even know it has happened until the deal is signed."

An hon. Member: Are you for, or against?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, that is the point. We in this House are not told enough to know whether we are for, or against, what the government is doing.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacFarlane: You had better change your detective firm, then.

Mr. Stevens: It is time that some of those silent mouths who sit on the government backbenches become disturbed when they see unemployment rising as it did this month. It is time that those silent mouths that might like to, but cannot, speak when they think they are not being noticed. It is time they got aroused and realized that the "whizz kids" on the front