

since you are indicating that my time is finished, that Canadians will remember.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East): Mr. Speaker, in bringing in closure to stop this debate on free trade, after only two days of debate at the report stage of the proceedings, the Government is committing a total affront to parliamentary democracy. Here we have what the Government claims to be the most important piece of legislation to be presented in this Parliament, and it has allowed five days of debate at second reading. Now, after two days of debate at the report stage, it is going to allow two more days at report stage, which is four days of debate at report stage, and then it will close down the debate with two days of debate at third reading.

In addition, the Government also imposed closure in the legislative committee when it only allowed three weeks of hearings for witnesses. There was a large demand for witnesses, not only to hold hearings here in Ottawa but all over the country.

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With this most important piece of legislation, the Government has imposed closure at every stage of proceedings. The debates have been of very brief duration. As I said, there was five days of debate at second reading, three weeks in committee to hear from witnesses and groups representing the people of Canada, and now there will be four days at report stage and two days at third reading.

The Government has said that imposing closure is justified because the opposition Parties have already made up their minds. They say that the Liberals have already made up their minds, they are against the agreement. The NDP Members have made up their minds, they are against the agreement. Since the Members of both Parties in opposition have made up their minds, why bother continuing with the debate? The Government completely misunderstands the purpose of debate in this House.

No one presumes for one minute that by debating issues in this House, we will convince government Members to change their minds and vote with the Opposition. We know that the Government has 211 Members and the Opposition has about 70 Members. We know that we will be out-voted on every issue on every occasion.

The purpose of debate is not to convince Members on the other side that they should vote with us; the purpose of the debate is to elucidate what is being debated for the benefit of the public outside the House, the great Canadian public, the citizens of Canada, so they will understand what we are debating. If we are limited to only four days on report stage and two days at third reading, we will not have time to explain to the Canadian public the faults of this particular legislation. Nor would the Government, if it were interested, have the time to explain the good points about the legislation. I say "if it

Time Allocation

were interested", because it is obvious from this debate, both at second reading and at report stages, that government Members are not really debating the details of this agreement. They are debating theoretical free trade.

Time and again, Members have said what a great thing free trade is and what it will do for Canada. However, they are not debating this very specific agreement with the United States. We in the Opposition, on the other hand, are debating the specific details of the agreement. To do so, we need time. That is why it is a travesty of parliamentary democracy that the Government is closing down debate after such a short period of time.

We are not interested in convincing those people over there. We would like to, but we know that that is a lost battle. With these many amendments, we are trying to bring to the attention of the Canadian public the failings and faults of the legislation so that Canadians will better understand it once we have an election.

I mentioned that we are interested in the details of the legislation. In addition, we take the position that the Government had no mandate for this legislation at the time of the election in 1984. It was not mentioned during the election campaign of 1984. As a matter of fact, the only words we heard from the leading figures of the Government prior to the election were spoken in 1983 when the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) said:

"Canadians rejected free trade with the United States in 1911. They would do so again in 1983. Canada must increase its share of total world trade, which has dropped by 33 per cent in the past two decades."

What did the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) say in 1983? He said:

"Bilateral free trade with the United States is simplistic and naive. It would only serve to further diminish our ability to compete internationally."

What did the former Secretary of State, David Crombie, say? He said:

"It's silly. Canada must improve relations in trade with the United States, of course. But our natural destiny is to become a global leader, not American's weak sister."

The Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) said similar words. Before the election campaign of 1984, these were the positions of the leading figures in the Government. During the election campaign of 1984, nothing was said.

In 1986, they started negotiating this agreement following the Shamrock Summit between the President of the United States and the Prime Minister in Quebec City. They started negotiating this agreement without any mandate, and then in October of 1987, we received a 35-page Elements of Agreement, which we were given little time to be debated. I believe there was a short one or two-day opposition day debate on that. Then in December, we received the 1,400-page full free trade agreement, and we had three days to debate that. We had three days of debate on a 1,400-page agreement a few days after it was sent to our offices, but the debate was not on the legislation. We only received the legislation in May of this year, a few months ago.