

one could get away with it, but it has to be done on a reciprocal basis.

When we sought agreements on urban transport, steel, informatics and agricultural implements, the four areas that we last tried to do sector by sector agreements on, we were quickly told by the United States administration that it was not interested. I am not so sure that the failure of this agreement would have any impact one way or the other. I think the difficulty is that sector by sector is a non-starter, would be frowned upon by GATT, and very likely would not be approved by the requisite two-thirds of the membership.

● (2000)

[Translation]

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne):** The period provided for questions and comments has now expired. Resuming debate. The Secretary of State (Mr. Bouchard).

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Secretary of State of Canada):** Madam Speaker, this occasion fills me with awe and respect, since it is the first time I have had an opportunity to rise in the House to speak in debate. I shall, if I may, address my initial remarks to my constituents in the riding of Lac-Saint-Jean, to those who made it possible for me to enter these precincts and who have placed their trust in me. I want to give them the assurance that I will do everything I can to deserve that trust and will always be available to listen to what they have to say.

I am of course delighted that my maiden speech will be in support of a bill that is vital to Canada's future, to our economic development and to the national reconciliation to which this Government has dedicated so much of its energies.

A great deal has been said since the beginning of the debate on the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, which has given rise to some remarks that were often bitter and spread a great deal of confusion in the minds of our opponents.

We are faced with two points of view. One is apocalyptic, and it is therefore necessary to try and put a more accurate perspective on this debate.

The Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement is merely an agreement that enshrines an irreversible reality. The facts are stubborn, that we know, and basically, it has been long accepted that our economies are interdependent. Actually, this agreement reflects a world-wide and unescapable trend towards putting an end to tariff barriers between trading nations.

At a time when the Common Market, with a population of 350 million people, is a reality that is increasingly making itself felt, our North American economy must also learn to express its maturity and get rid of artificial barriers on the road to progress.

I referred to Europe, Madam Speaker. We have all heard the arguments that raised the spectre of Canadian sovereignty being undermined as a result of the agreement. We must

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realize that Europe went through this a long time ago and since then has taken some realistic steps, going beyond the stage of an economic market to a commitment to a continental political entity. We must not forget that in Europe there are several political institutions, including the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, and that we in Canada must become part of the international market, the international club of trading nations, mindful of the fact that a nation that does not have a market of 100 million people is doomed to failure.

We are a big country, we have almost unlimited resources, but we are few in number. One of the difficulties with our country is that we have the will to succeed, we have all it takes, everything needed for what we desire, but we are limited by our numbers. With our population of 26 million, we cannot isolate ourselves, living in a world where interdependence is the rule.

This means that the dynamics of events, history, everything that drives the economy, the whole outlook for this country require an agreement with the large trading partner next to us.

Trade between Canada and the United States has increased steadily since 1935, when we first reduced tariffs. Today, we know how important trade with our southern neighbours is.

In Europe, when I was Ambassador in France, I often told the French people and Europeans with whom I spoke, to impress upon them the importance of our trade with the United States, that in some years the Province of Ontario alone sold the United States as much as all of Japan, if not more. I assure you that compared to the situation in Europe, this makes people realize how dangerous it is for us and for our country not to ensure secure access for such an important trade. Basically, people who tell us about the dangers for sovereignty should themselves recognize that the best way to assure Canadian sovereignty is secure access to the American market. We cannot live every day at the mercy of the U.S. Congress, when our trade is so important. Remember that when President Nixon slapped a levy on all Canadian imports a few years ago we immediately had an economic crisis on our hands. We cannot accept to live with this threat. We must set our sovereignty on a firm base. We must for ever protect our economic security. We must sign the agreement.

Today's new reality is that Canada-U.S. trade is no longer a one-way street. People like Campeau, Bombardier, Seagram and Molson control thousands of jobs south of the border. Canadians and Americans have gradually become partners on the same market of 250 million consumers.

What Canada needs to do now in this context is to make sure that we stand fast against the wave of protectionism in the United States and maintain this vital market for our economy by signing a firm agreement with our American partner.

Madam Speaker, I come from Quebec. I represent a riding there and our people have reached a strong consensus concerning the free trade issue. For very sound reasons, politicians as