

Free Trade

House of Commons on Friday, December 11, 1987, and the amendment of Mr. Langdon (p. 11885).

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, this is more than a debate about trade. This debate is indeed about the kind of Canada we intend to leave our children. Canadians have to make important choices if tomorrow's Canada is to be sovereign, independent and dynamic. I believe that we Canadians can make the right choices to control our own future without sacrificing our sovereignty, without sacrificing our economic independence, and without submitting to the lure of continentalism.

We have the privilege of living in the freest, most tolerant country in the world. Our Charter of Rights, our social safety net, our unshakable sense of fairness, are proof that we do have a deep commitment as a people to improving the quality of life of all our citizens.

● (1310)

This debate compels us, first, to think of Canada. I believe it appropriate and relevant for me to tell you, Mr. Speaker, as presiding officer of this great institution, what Canada means to me. It means our sense of tolerance, our unique history, our generous mix of cultures, our two languages, our parliamentary system, our priceless environmental heritage, the cleanliness and safety of our big cities, and the special Canadian sense of fairness. It means the fact that when you go to a doctor or a hospital they do not ask to check your credit rating before they check your pulse.

Quite simply, and I am not ashamed to say it in this place, I love it here. I love what we have built as a nation, I love what we stand for and, above all, I love that it is ours. We have made a conscious choice to live here. We made a conscious choice to build this country against the odds, against the weather, against geography, and against the unceasing pressures coming from south of our border. We made a conscious choice to build this country, East, West, and North. In order to bind it we built a railway, an airline, a broadcasting system, a pipeline, and a national highway. These are the links, the bonds we built against the raw force of continentalism which would have turned us south.

This trade deal would destroy those bonds pulling us into a continental vortex dominated by the United States. What is worse, it will not be a conscious choice by Canadians because, if the Government has its way, Canadians will have absolutely nothing to say about it.

I have had the opportunity to read this document. It is a massive document buttressed by a total of 2,500 pages just released by the Government, the details of the trade deal with the United States. This deal represents nothing less than the title deed to our country, the deed which, thanks to the Government, will now be held by and for the people of the United States. This is the most massive giveaway of our sovereignty in history.

In order that we understand each other in this House I want to tell you what I mean by sovereignty. When I say sovereignty I mean having the final ability and authority to govern our own country, to choose our own directions, and to work toward fulfilling our own national purpose. When I say sovereignty I mean having the authority to develop economic and social policies which meet Canadian needs and respond to Canadian priorities. When I say sovereignty I mean being able to share the wealth of the nation in a way which promotes and enhances Canadian values and traditions. When I say sovereignty I mean supporting our own culture through a strong and thriving artistic community which reflects the soul of our nation and our way of life. When I say sovereignty I mean having our own foreign and defence policies which reflect our concern for peace in the world and for human rights which should know no frontiers.

That is what I mean when I speak of sovereignty. We are the elected representatives of the people of a great country. Canadians have charged us with the responsibility of defending and enhancing that sovereignty. This deal is a betrayal of that sovereignty because it fundamentally alters the way this nation has operated, the way in which this nation has pursued its own economic, social, political, and cultural values. It alters it not only for now but for tomorrow and for generations to come.

Who speaks for our children? We are selling out their birthright—a word for “sovereignty” which people can understand. When they grow up and ask, “Where were you when we sold out?”, who will stand up and answer that question and tell them why we did it?

Why did we get into this deal in the first place? We were told by those who believe in this deal that it would give us secure access to the United States market. There was no other purpose for the deal than secure access to the U.S. market and an exemption from U.S. protection, particularly as evidenced in the U.S. Congress and as written in U.S. trade law.

However, as we in this Party have pointed out repeatedly, and as I outlined to the Ottawa Board of Trade a year and a half ago, secure access meant exempting us from United States trade law. It also meant an impartial binding dispute mechanism which would enforce that exemption from U.S. trade law. Without that, I told the Ottawa Board of Trade and I say again, the deal would not have been fair, it would not have been free, and it would not have been worth the paper it was written on.

I took that position a year and a half ago and gradually the Government came around to agreeing. In March, although she denied the concept in the House three days ago in response to questions I put to her, the Minister for International Trade (Miss Carney) said that the objective of any trade agreement “would be the elimination of countervail by both countries”. Two or three days ago in the House she said that this was never her objective.