

# Trade Minister launches blistering attack on NDP

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The majority Harper government isn't waiting for the ink to dry on election returns before testing the NDP's pledge to seek more civility and respect between members of Parliament.

In a downtown Ottawa speech Thursday morning, International Trade Minister Ed Fast launched a fresh partisan attack on the new Official Opposition, accusing New Democrats of being set on policies that would “stall growth, kill jobs and set Canadian families back.”

Listeners could be forgiven for wondering whether the 41st election campaign was still being contested. The broadside against the NDP suggests the perpetual campaign the Tories waged during their minority government years will not be wound down soon.

Mr. Fast called Jack Layton's party “reflexively and ideologically anti-trade,” accusing it of acting contrary to the interests of “hard-working Canadians.”

The Tories can't really complain of obstructionism in Parliament now that they control the Commons and, effectively, the Senate.

The new minister, appointed to his portfolio in the May 18 cabinet shuffle, will have an easier time passing legislation to enact free trade deals than his predecessors did when the Tories had only a minority government that required support from opposition parties to make laws.

The Tories can use their majority powers – 166 seats – to limit and curb debate on any bill they want passed.

Mr. Fast nevertheless warned a business and government audience that the NDP presents an obstacle to the Harper government's intent to "intensify" signing of free trade deals.

"We must realize that we also face real challenges here at home, domestically," Mr. Fast said.

"The new Official Opposition in this 41st Parliament – the NDP – is planning to vigorously oppose our plan for jobs and growth through trade," the Trade Minister said.

"They have opposed every single free trade deal Prime Minister Harper has made and pursued since 2006 and – in their new role as Official Opposition – can be counted on to aggressively oppose and try to block every single step we try to take to advance our pro-trade plan."

The Conservatives have about a dozen trade deals on their to-do list including a major agreement being negotiated with the 27-member European Union and another FTA with India.

"While our government's focus is on jobs, prosperity and preserving and strengthening the financial security of Canadians through trade, the NDP's focus is and will continue to be reflexively and ideologically anti-trade," Mr. Fast said in his speech.

"While we are working on behalf of hardworking Canadians to continue to create jobs and economic growth, the NDP – supported by groups and organizations that don't have the real priorities of hardworking Canadians at heart – can be counted on to advocate outdated policies that if ever implemented would stall growth, kill jobs and set Canadian families back."

Mr. Fast warned his audience of the "competitiveness challenge" posed by rapidly developing and newly industrialized countries that are rivalling Canada in many fields.

"Globalization has levelled the playing field, giving even small, developing economies unprecedented opportunities to sell their goods, products and services around the world.," he said.

"Places like Hong Kong, South Korea and Singapore led the way, quickly becoming prosperous economies with high standards of living. They're being joined by China, Brazil, India and Southeast Asia."

The minister warned Canada needs to become more competitive.

"These economies are going head-to-head with Canadian companies on the global stage and we need to ensure that businesses and government work together to tip the balance in favour of Canada," he said.

"We are doing this already through our low-tax plan and by expanding trade, but the financial well-being of all Canadians requires us to continue to improve our competitiveness."

Adam Taylor, director of communications for Mr. Fast, said the Tories are not trying to undermine efforts to bring more decorum to Ottawa.

He said the Conservatives anticipate the New Democrats will criticize the government's drive for more agreements to liberalize trade. The Tories feel it's important to draw this free-trade deal antipathy to the attention of "people sitting around their kitchen table" or following the debate on TV or in the newspaper.

"Now the official Opposition, the strongest opposition in a long, long time, is vehemently opposed to them," he said. "And we just think that's a fair and necessary contrast to drive -- even in a majority Parliament."