

Customs Tariff

contribute to the very fund from which the other spouse is drawing.

I wish to thank my hon. colleague, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier for raising that point. It certainly verifies the practicality of the suggestions that we are making.

● (1050)

On the recommendation of all Members of the House, the Government has brought this principle forward in the judges Bill. I congratulate them on that. I hope we will continue to even out the other inequities which still exist for spouses who remarry and are receiving pensions in part which were earned while their now deceased spouses were working in the government service of Canada in whatever area of activity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion agreed to, Bill read the third time and passed.

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CUSTOMS TARIFF

MEASURE TO ENACT

The House resumed from Wednesday, December 9, consideration of the motion of Mr. Hockin that Bill C-87, an Act respecting the imposition of duties of customs and other charges, to give effect to the International Convention on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System, to provide relief against the imposition of certain duties of customs or other charges, to provide for other related matters and to amend or repeal certain Acts in consequence thereof, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak for a few minutes on the customs tariff Bill. Bill C-87 is an important piece of legislation. It has become more important in the last little while than we had realized. It is a revision and updating of the customs Act, but it also provides for the harmonization of tariffs between Canada and its trading partners. The major trading partners of Canada include quite a number of countries. Among others, we do approximately 80 per cent of our trade with the United States of America.

The routines involved in the trade process are important to both importers and exporters in Canada. This updating is necessary. It will allow for computerization of the process, to some extent, so that the system will work much more effectively and we will be much more able to control the movement of

trade and the amount of trade between Canada and its many trading partners.

When Bill C-87 was brought in a few months ago, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) made a suggestion that it would be a routine Bill. However, when we started looking at it we found a number of very important clauses and powers being given, including the power to levy a surtax, the power to put on import controls, the power to suspend trading rights which Canada has granted by agreement with other countries, and the power to levy surcharges on certain types of imports.

It also includes an extremely important power which will be given to the Governor in Council. For example, Clause 62 reads as follows:

The Governor in Council may, on the recommendation of the Minister of Finance, by order,

(a) reduce or remove customs duties on goods imported from any country by way of compensation for concessions granted by that country or any other country, subject to such conditions as may be specified in the order; and

(b) extend the benefit of any order made pursuant to paragraph (a) to any country as may be required by Canada's international obligations, subject to such conditions as may be specified in the order.

Parliament is being asked to authorize Cabinet to approve new tariffs in Canada's trade with the United States. Cabinet would then be able to use this power without reference to Parliament. That in itself has changed Bill C-87 from a fairly routine one, which most of us probably would have passed a couple of years ago without really looking at it, to a very important Bill which can have real impact on how Canada acts and reacts in the next while.

We must recognize that the Governor in Council having this kind of power is actually the way things in respect to customs have worked for a long period of time. We are really talking about a traditional position of the past. However, what is important now is the fact that a free trade agreement is in the wind and the Bill would allow the federal Government great latitude in making decisions about the tariff structure of Canada without reference to Parliament.

As I said, it has been the practice of previous Governments to operate this way, but if the free trade pact becomes part of the relationships between Canada and the United States particularly, or becomes, as Reagan put it, the new economic constitution for North America, it will make a difference. We must remember that this is being carried forward without little chance for Canadians or Parliament to be involved in the decision on how free trade will work. We have just received the final copy of the legal terms of the agreement, and the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) will sign it on January 2. It will commit Canada to an agreement without Canadians having had time to look at it. Consequently this Bill which would give authority to Cabinet is much more important than it has been. We had hoped that report stage and committee stage would result in some changes to the Bill. Of course we put forward a number of amendments.