

*Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*

Standing Orders. It is curious that none of the six members of the Opposition, including the two House Leaders, who have spoken have chosen to deal at all with the change in usages and forms which flow from our collective decision to change the rules of the House of Commons.

Why is that, Mr. Speaker? If our precedents and customs are so clear that the motion should be ruled in order and should not be split, why have they not dealt with usages and forms? I suggest that it is because the opportunity system provided by the reform of Parliament for Members to deal in other ways with the substantive content of their particular motion and this particular Bill would give you an even stronger basis than your predecessors have had for the rejection of the procedural arguments coming from across the floor.

We have had a traditional second reading motion to accomplish a single goal. There is no difficulty about Members voting on the principle of the Bill. It is a Bill to implement a trading arrangement. Passage of that takes the Bill to a committee. Each Party in the House of Commons is represented on the committee and can change Members at any time. The committee can call witnesses and hear evidence.

The job of the committee is not necessarily to determine whether or not the fine print of the Bill does what is best for Canada—in fact I think a second reading motion takes that out of their domain—but to consider whether or not the legislation and its fine print give effect to the trade agreement. They are to determine whether it is a faithful reproduction, in all of its words, of the agreement undertaken with another nation.

Various Members opposite have referred to the American system. This House of Commons set up a special committee to travel across the country before the agreement was finalized and to report back to the House on the principles of the agreement. The agreement was signed some six months ago. As a result of parliamentary reform, from that moment on 28 standing committees of this House could have examined its substantive provisions wherever and whenever they wanted.

Nine American committees did so. However, there has been no pressure from the Opposition for any of our 28 committees to do likewise. There is no committee report on the floor of this Chamber, some six months later, raising any question about this agreement in terms of the responsibilities, rights, and privileges of our standing committees.

The minute this Bill was presented to us at first reading stage, any of the standing committees of the House with an interest in the subject matter could have begun a process of investigation leading to reporting back to the House about the substance. To the best of our knowledge no committee chairman has been asked by a single Member of this Chamber to examine the substance of the Bill before us.

The opportunity systems are there. If we pass this motion as we have historically passed all similar motions, without any procedural wrinkles, the committee can amend it to ensure it

accords with the agreement. When it comes back to the House there can be amendments proposed with regard to every single comma, every single word, and every single clause, by any Member of the Chamber. There is ample opportunity, through the legislative committee process alone, for adequate examination of this.

Let us assume that we split this legislation into 27 separate Bills with 27 separate legislative committees. The responsibility of those committee members would be to understand all the implications of that massive document before they could deal with the clauses designed to implement. It makes a great deal more sense to have, and Members can take a great deal more comfort from the knowledge that it will be, a single committee understanding the agreement in its totality and looking at the fine print of the clauses to see whether or not the clauses implement the treaty.

It is a single subject and a single agreement and must be conceived as a whole. It is a treaty born of discussion. Fifteen central advisory committees advised the Canadian Government on this as it went along. There was give and take on both sides. The agreement has been signed and it must be respected. The implementation of it is in Bill C-130. This is not to be a discussion about the agreement but about the implementation of the agreement as signed and previously approved by the House. That is much better done by a single committee which understands the nuances of the agreement and whose wisdom can grow as it advances the causes.

It is my strongly held belief, Mr. Speaker, after listening for the better part of three hours, that we have heard very little, in the last hour in particular, that would be relevant to the procedural argument itself. There is always a tendency to talk about the substance of this Bill, but this debate today is to deal with a procedure. I suggest that your hands are tied on the basis of precedent. It would not be a wise use of the time of the Chamber to continue with this argument when it is so clear that the procedure must be upheld. Failure to uphold the procedure would perhaps plunge the House into chaos.

**Mr. Speaker:** I thank the Hon. Member.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take part in this debate at the procedural level. I do not intend to speak to the substance of Bill C-130, an Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the United States of America.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House consider this so-called omnibus bill to be totally unacceptable. In the few moments at my disposal, I wish to support what was said by my House Leader, the Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray) and many Opposition Members who raised some very good points this morning, and touch on two or three points which, I feel, are very important at the procedural level, for the debate in this House and consideration of the proposed legislation tabled by the Government.