

Customs Tariff

I listened with interest when the Minister of State for Finance (Mr. Hockin) said that this legislation ought to go through quickly and that the Opposition should stop debating it. We have just begun to debate it. That is what we are here for. Our job is to debate in the House of Commons. The Minister of State for Finance has told us not to debate this legislation, but I say that this is one of the only opportunities we have to point out the folly of the present system as we move toward this so-called free trade deal with the United States.

Today is December 1, and in four-weeks' time this agreement with the United States will be signed. I ask myself if this particular Bill is covered by the deal. I suspect you are asking yourself that question, Mr. Speaker, as are many other Members of the House of Commons.

Under the free trade deal with the United States, will goods produced in Mexico be allowed to be considered American products for trade? That is a reasonable question, but we do not know the answer because we have not seen the agreement. It is a bit like asking someone to sign a will, a contract or a mortgage without reading it. It is like asking management and labour to sign a collective agreement without looking at it.

Mr. Tobin: It is like buying a used car without checking that there is a motor under the hood.

Mr. Riis: My hon. friend says that it is like buying a used car without checking to see if there is a motor under the hood. This is really peculiar. I cannot imagine how Members of the House of Commons could ask Canadians to sign an agreement that no one has seen. It seems illogical and kind of humorous. It is as though a joke has been played. Maybe someone will wake up and say: "Hey, April fool's, we've been fooling you all along". However, that is not the case. Four weeks from tonight, we will be getting ready to sign that agreement which no one has seen yet.

My friend from Ottawa Centre is an opposition Member who is obviously very concerned about this trading arrangement and about Bill C-87 which harmonizes customs definitions. He has asked if goods produced in Mexico will be allowed to be deemed American goods. Presumably government Members are saying yes to this. If they are not saying yes, then I suppose they will rise shortly to explain what they mean by their presumed opposition to this amendment.

I can only say with increasing frustration that as January 2, the day we are to sign this agreement, draws closer I wonder when we will see the agreement. As a matter of fact, I recall the Minister for International Trade (Miss Carney) saying on many occasions that by the end of November, we will all have seen the agreement and Canadians will then have a whole month to evaluate it. Well, November has passed and it is now December. To be fair, some of us would probably like to spend a few days around Christmas not debating or thinking a whole lot about the free trade agreement. However, we may not have the pleasure of that break.

• (1220)

Mr. Tobin: We'll get our holiday turkey on January 2.

Mr. Riis: Well, we will get something on January 2. I expect that there will be all kinds of interesting animals coming at us as a result of this.

In all fairness, Mr. Speaker, has a government in the history of this country ever said that it is entering into a fantastic major contract with another country but was not going to tell anyone what was in it, that it did not even know what was in it because it was still being negotiated, yet asked people to support it before anyone saw it?

My hon. friend, the Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy), has moved a most reasoned amendment which recommends that we pass legislation to say that goods which are partly or wholly produced in Mexico shall not be deemed to originate in the United States. I have seen a lot of amendments, and this is probably the most logical and sensible one I have seen in a long time. With regard to the implications which free trade will have for Canadian manufacturers, large, medium and small, we would be well advised to pass this forthwith and get on with the discussion of Motions Nos. 2 and 3.

Miss Aideen Nicholson (Trinity): Mr. Speaker, the amendment proposed by the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy) is very straightforward. It simply says that under this Bill no goods which are manufactured or partly manufactured in Mexico shall be deemed to be made in the U.S. The Minister objects to that. He says that this is discriminating against Mexico. We could implement a subamendment providing that no goods originating outside of the U.S. are to be deemed to be made in the U.S.

The Minister says that the question of the rule of origin will be part of the free trade agreement. To make it even simpler, why not have a definition of the rule of origin right in this Bill? Why wait for the so-called free trade agreement which we have not seen? The Minister is very good at telling us that Bills are simple and technical and that we should trust him that all will be well.

I was Chairman of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association during a two-year period when the access of Greece and Portugal to the Common Market was being negotiated. It was fascinating to watch the process of product-by-product negotiation, with clear examination of economic impact at every step and a real commitment to raise the standard of living in the poorer countries.

The Government is not negotiating publicly. We do not know what is on the table and what is off. We have seen a 30-page agreement in principle, but we are waiting for the fine print. The Minister has brought in this Bill and said, "Don't worry, just pass it. It's technical. The fine print of the free trade agreement will settle everything". That is not a very satisfactory way to proceed.