

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

would be repetitive. The Hon. Member put before the House a number of things he was able to find to make the argument that in the name of democracy, parliamentary tradition and what this place stands for, in order to have a proper debate on behalf of the people of Canada and to represent ourselves well on behalf of the people of Canada, this Bill should be split up into its constituent parts. I know that if Members on the opposite side of the House were in opposition, they would be making the same argument.

I was here many times when John Diefenbaker, Ged Baldwin, Walter Baker and a gentleman I saw today on Parliament Hill, Bob Stanfield, made that argument. When they were on this side of the House, they made those arguments time and time again. I am sure that if Hon. Members opposite would take off their ideological blinders, they would be making these kinds of speeches once again in the House of Commons. The ghost of John Diefenbaker must be extremely angry about what he is seeing happening in the House of Commons today.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker, I will not try to pretend to be any kind of an expert on parliamentary procedure, but I want to begin by saying that I and my colleague from Yorkton—Melville were in this Chamber in January of 1971 when Mr. Speaker Lamoureux made the statement that is recorded at page 2768 of *Hansard*. At that time, he posed the question: "Where do we stop, where is the point of no return?" I will not repeat the quote; you have heard it several times.

If my memory serves me reasonably well, the atmosphere in the House that day and the tone of Mr. Speaker Lamoureux's remarks and the quality of his statement served as a stern warning and as notice to the Government not to exceed acceptable limits and the usual practices of the House. He chose not to rule on what was an acceptable limit.

For the next six years, we had no problems with omnibus Bills. There were a few complaints, but essentially there were no problems for the next six years. The Government behaved when it came to what went into omnibus Bills and how many there were.

You and I know, as well as all Hon. Members, Mr. Speaker, the way things work around here. This Bill amends 27 statutes. We know that in the practices of this House, with a Government in a majority situation, the rights and privileges not only of Members of this place but of members of the population of Canada will get abused or misused. Anyone who could even contemplate that the Government would allow witnesses to appear before a legislative committee or a standing committee with submissions and suggested amendments to 27 pieces of legislation has to be dreaming in Technicolor. I submit that that supports a phrase used a couple of times earlier today about trampling on the rights not only of Members of Parliament but of citizens of Canada.

We all know that the reality is that the committee and the House will get time allocation. Each of the 27 statutes to be amended will not receive, and in fact, after what the Minister has already said, cannot receive the time and attention that each one of those statutes deserves.

It is obvious that the normal and acceptable procedure in the House for many, many years has been that a Bill that is brought in by the Government can amend two, three, four, five or even a half dozen other statutes. My former colleague from New Westminster has been cited earlier today as speaking in 1977 when there were amendments to five statutes. Mr. Speaker Jerome would not accept that as being unacceptable, but I ask you, in the name of whomever—I will even try God if it will help—if it is acceptable to amend 27 statutes as this Bill does.

I hope you are Speaker in this place for many, many years. The Lord willing, your health permitting and your patience allowing, you will certainly have the support of the great majority of the Members of this place, no matter how you rule. You are the first one who does not rely upon the whim of some other person. You are in the unenviable position of having to set a precedent, depending upon how you decide. I know that that is an agonizing and difficult decision for you, Sir.

It seems to me, Sir, that you must decide now, not later, without leaving it to some other event in the future, whether or not the amending of 27 statutes in one piece of legislation is acceptable. If you should decide to rule, Sir, and I would respect your ruling, that it is acceptable to amend 27 statutes in one Bill, then this or future Governments not only can but will try to amend 29, 30, 35 or 40 statutes in one piece of legislation.

● (1540)

Sir, I submit with all respect that, for the first time, in spite of what has been said earlier today about precedents and practices, there has yet to be a ruling on what is acceptable or what is beyond the normal practices and procedures of the House. When I say "the House", that means all the committees, standing and legislative, and Committee of the Whole. That covers the entire operation of the Parliament of Canada, and particularly this House.

It seems to me, and I say this with all respect and regard, Sir, the time has now arrived for you to act upon that stern warning of Mr. Speaker Lamoureux. I say with all regard and sincerity that his calm attitude, his statesmanship, his niceness, reached its limits on that occasion in 1971. I wish that he had ruled on what was acceptable and what was not. He chose not to, and that was his prerogative.

I suggest, Sir, that you exercise that prerogative now because the time has arrived to act on that 1971 warning to the Government of the day. It is time, Sir, for you to act on that warning to the present Government and any succeeding Government by breaking ground, setting a precedent which can be used from now on, no matter what political Party is in