

Free Trade

people, exercising their democratic rights, can determine what the national interest is. We have had some long debates in this House, and I remember the debate we had on the National Capital. I remember this one particularly because an important point was made there. At the time it was said that the National Capital should be developed, in the national interest, by a commission appointed to that end. I spoke at some length about the definition of the words "national interest", and *Hansard* is there to prove it, Mr. Speaker. What exactly do those words mean? Well, we finally consulted the provincial Premiers, and who, when they met here in Ottawa for a federal-provincial conference, decided that the national interest should be clear and precise and that it had to be determined, and they did so. They also decided that the National Capital went beyond the City of Ottawa to encompass the entire National Capital Region. That is the location of the seat of government, and it is that experience I draw on to define the term "national interest".

Mr. Speaker, I suggest that you refer to the proceedings in *Hansard* and read the important debate that took place on the definition of the term "national interest", and I submit, with respect, that today, all the Official Opposition is trying to do is to clarify intelligibly the terms "national interest", in a way that I believe is to the advantage of Canadians and of our democratic process.

[*English*]

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I would like to add a few words to this debate. Unfortunately, I will not be on the same side of the question as my colleagues who just spoke.

I think it is very important that the House understand very clearly the question which is before it so that when the House decides on it everyone will know exactly what the House has decided. I suggest that the words that are used and the placement of the words in the amendment make it vague as to its intent.

If members of the Opposition wanted to put an election reference in the resolution it would be possible to do so, but I would have worded it differently and I would have inserted it in a different position. Unfortunately, I am not in a position to help my colleague. That he will have to do for himself.

The amendment as worded could seem to suggest that the election of September 4, 1984 was in the national interest. We happen to think so, so that if that was the intent we might agree with the amendment since that election definitely was in the national interest. The amendment could also mean, and I think this is what my friend is driving at, that this should only happen after a general election which would be in the national interest.

I submit that the problem with the amendment is that it is vague. Beauchesne says that vagueness alone cannot rule out an amendment, but I think we could also look at the lack of specificity in the proposed amendment.

The amendment also violates the principles of relevance and scope. For example, the amendment adds new material and/or a new question to the question that is before the House, and that is the question of determination by the people of Canada. The words do not make it clear to the reader whether, if the entire motion as amended were to pass, the referendum would have happened, may have happened or would happen in the future. I suppose I am saying that it is vague in its placement and it is vague in its wording. I suggest it could be worded more precisely.

The Hon. Member could have taken some direction from Beauchesne's Citation 426 which states that an amendment must make the whole main question intelligible. I suggest that as worded, and as placed, the amendment is vague as to what election the Hon. Member means, the election just passed or an election the Hon. Member looks forward to in the future.

As well, the amendment presses a little too hard against the limits of relevance and scope, and of course that is for the Chair to decide. Based on that, I submit that the amendment should be ruled out of order because it is vague as to which general election it refers to and I think it is improperly placed in the question which is before the House.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the Minister of State (Mr. Lewis), having available to him all the precedents set forth in Beauchesne's and other precedents that have not been set forth, can only come up with the criticism that the amendment is vague.

● (1530)

I think it is a matter for argument or debate once the amendment is accepted as to the value of its content. However, I respectfully submit that there is nothing in the amendment, taken by itself or reading it in connection with the resolution, that would support the argument that the amendment is so vague as to contravene Citation 426, which is based on Erskine May. It states:

It is an imperative rule that every amendment must be relevant to the question on which the amendment is proposed.

My hon. friend, the Deputy Government House Leader has not attacked the amendment on the grounds of relevance. He concedes that it is relevant. The citation goes on to say:

Every amendment proposed to be made, either to a question or to a proposed amendment, should be so framed that, if agreed to by the House, the question or amendment as amended would be intelligible and consistent with itself.

The Deputy Government House Leader has not argued that the motion as amended, if the amendment were to be accepted, would be inconsistent or unintelligible. Instead, he relies on the argument that there is something vague about the amendment. He argues that it is not clear to which general election the amendment refers.

With regard to that argument, let me say first that this should be more a matter of debate than anything else, but even if one tries to meet his argument head on, I submit that my