

*Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*

Speaker, you would be promoting the capacity of Parliament to debate and to inform the public, without in any way impairing the capacity of the Government to govern. Even if we were to deal with several pieces of legislation, rather than one piece, which would have the consequence of increasing the amount of time that the House would spend on this matter, even if it went to the extent that the Government felt that it could not pass this legislation before it had to have another general election, the consequence of such decisions would simply be that the people of the country, having been informed through parliamentary debate, would have a chance to make a decision on whether or not the country will adhere to the free trade agreement.

If the voters then decided that they approved of the action of the Government, then the Government would simply be returned with a renewed majority to implement its policies based on a mandate from the people. Therefore, the capacity of the Government to govern through this institution would in no way be impaired.

However, if we go in the other direction, if a decision is made that the legislation necessary to implement the free trade agreement shall come before the House as a single piece of legislation so that all we are asked is a yes-or-no question, then obviously the amount of debate that the free trade agreement will receive in the country will be very much restricted as a result of that type of decision. The people will be less well informed, and obviously the desire of the Government to treat matters in the House in what it feels is an efficient matter would be promoted, but at a great expense to the amount and quality of debate in the country.

The decision that you make, Mr. Speaker, is a crucial decision. It will affect the capacity of this Parliament to serve as an instrument for the consent of the Government, and, therefore, in the long run for the real capacity to have democratic government in this country. The legislation before us is unprecedented in terms of its range. One only has to look at the "Table of Provisions" contained in the back of the Bill which indicates all the Acts to be amended by this legislation. Even when one looks at it from the point of view of the legislation that will be amended, it includes the Canada Agricultural Products Standards Act, the Bank Act, the Broadcasting Act, the Copyright Act, the Customs Act, and a whole range of other Acts. Because of its range the legislation is unprecedented. It requires full debate in order to achieve the consent of the people.

The historic nature of this debate is underlined by all of the statements from the Government as it points out that the free trade agreement will affect every sector of Canadian society, whether it is cultural, investment, or natural resources. All segments of Canadian society are concerned about this agreement.

We in the New Democratic Party caucus met with a group this morning called the Pro-Canada Network. It is made up of citizens from the labour movement, the environmental

movement, and the peace movement who are concerned about the implications of this legislation for the arms policy in this country. It also included agricultural representatives and businessmen. The whole nature of Canadian society is impacted by this legislation. The Government is seeking to bring forward in this Chamber the notion that all that is required is a simple yes or no, or "Do you want to adhere to the free trade agreement?" That is a proposition that is appropriate if one is attempting to fashion a plebiscite, which is one of the instruments of democracy that exists in a theoretical sense and certainly exists in actual practice in the State of California. This very procedure is what we have criticized the free trade agreement in substance of doing, that is, Americanizing Canada.

Where we are today is a parliamentary chamber. We live and function in a representative democracy. We do not have a plebiscitarian democracy. We have a representative democracy. The fundamental nature of a representative democracy is that debate by representatives of the people on substantive matters will inform the public. The informed public will then bring the pressure of its decision and conclusions about what is going on to the Government. That will determine fundamentally in how many pieces this legislation is split, and whether such legislation will ever get through the House. Your decision, Mr. Speaker, contributes to the capacity of this Parliament to effect its fundamental purpose, namely to give life to democracy in Canada.

● (1640)

I referred at the beginning of my remarks to Beauchesne and to the principles of parliamentary law which indicate, and I will paraphrase, yes, there has to be an opportunity for a Government to govern, for the majority to govern. But there also has to be an opportunity for the minority in the House to give expression to the concerns of the people. You have to balance the capacity to govern with the necessity of getting the consent to govern.

The proposition placed before you is to bring forward one piece of legislation which says, "Do you want the free trade agreement or not? Yes or no". That is insufficient. The consequences of allowing that procedure to be followed will greatly diminish the debate given to this historic policy question facing Canadians. The consequence of making a decision to encourage the implementation of the free trade Bill through several pieces of legislation would be to provide greater opportunity for debate, greater opportunity to inform the public and greater opportunity to have a real democratic decision, to have the consent of the Government. That is a matter to which I would draw your attention as you make this very difficult and historic decision.

**Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops-Shuswap):** Mr. Speaker, I have two or three points in wrapping up. I think in my presentation earlier today I referred to an incident where the Chair was stormed by members of the Opposition of the day. I