

Free Trade

refer here to Citation 425 of *Beauchesne's Fifth Edition* which reads:

The object of an amendment may be either to modify a question in such a way as to increase its acceptability or to present to the House a different proposition as an alternative to the original which must, however, be relevant to the subject of the questions.

Third, the amendment must stay within the scope of the motion and not raise a matter which is foreign to the proposition raised in the main motion. I refer here to Citation 437 in *Beauchesne's Fifth Edition* which reads:

An amendment setting forth a proposition dealing with a matter which is far into the proposition involved in the main motion is not relevant and cannot be moved.

In my judgment, the amendment proposed by the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry meets all of these requirements for the following reasons. The motion specifically states that the House “endorse, as being in the national interest”. The amendment does not seek to introduce a new concept, Mr. Speaker, but simply seeks to define the term. Seeking greater definition and clarity is an acceptable objective of any amendment and the motion makes no reference about how the national interest is defined. The amendment clarifies this question by stating that the people of Canada will define whether or not the trade agreement is in the national interest. That seems to me to be perfectly in line with the traditions of Parliament in terms of the amendment and the practices of a democratic society. Furthermore, the amendment does not impose in a strict sense a condition to be met before the motion can be accepted but rather simply offers a means of defining national interest.

Who determines what is in the national interest, Mr. Speaker? Surely the people of Canada are the ultimate arbitrators when it comes to this critical question. How can they express their decision on this question? A general election is the normal way of meeting this objective. There are others, I suppose; the theory of a national referendum et cetera, but we reject those and recognize that a general election is the normal way.

The amendment simply states the obvious. It was the Government which introduced the concept of national interest into this motion in the first place and the amendment simply seeks a definition of how to determine what is in the national interest.

I want to add as a general suggestion for you to consider, namely, that on this very critical matter, you be generous in your interpretation. I ask you to be generous because I note in previous comments you have indicated a concern when a similar motion keeps reappearing in this House.

● (1520)

Regarding the whole matter of motions, Erskine May says that a motion or an amendment which is the same in substance as a question which has been decided in the affirmative or negative during the current Session may not be brought forward again during that Session.

We all recognize that we in this House have actually discussed, debated and voted on issues very similar to the one before us today which has been introduced by the Government. If we were to follow the letter of the law according to Erskine May, we might suggest that the motion itself is not in order. However, I do not want to argue that because I think we all agree that this is an important issue. I think all Canadians recognize that it is an important issue and I believe we want to be generous in our interpretation of the motion under past practices of the House, recognizing the importance of it and, equally so, recognizing the importance of the amendment put forward by my friend from Winnipeg—Fort Garry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I have a few comments to make in support of the motion of the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy). The intent of the amendment which I have here before me is to qualify the word “interest” as being determined by the exercise of our democratic rights, and to amend the motion after the word “interest” to read as follows: “That this House endorse, as being in the national interest, as determined by the people of Canada in a general election, the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement”. Mr. Speaker, what we are trying to do with this motion is to ensure that the words “national interest” are clearly understood as being an expression of the democratic will of the Canadian people, as expressed in a general election. To say that the amendment imposes a condition on the main motion is nonsense. We say it does not impose a condition, it clarifies, and I think the motion meets the requirements of the Standing Orders, or at least of *Beauchesne's Fourth Edition*, Citation 203, which says, in referring to amendments, and I quote:

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

The term “national interest” is the subject of an amendment, and to continue Citation 203;

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.

I think it is “intelligible and consistent” to say that the Canadian people must decide whether the national interest is at stake. According to the Government’s proposal—the motion before the House today—it is in the national interest to agree to endorse this Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement.

What we are doing, Mr. Speaker, is to specify clearly and intelligibly that the national interest must be determined in a general election, which will deal with this question in a democratic manner.

Mr. Speaker, I will not lay claim much longer to the time of the House, because I realize other Members want to speak as well, but I would ask the Chair to consider only that we are trying to clarify, to provide the House with a clear and specific proposal to amend the main motion, an amendment I know Canadians will see as a *conditio sine qua non* for determining the “national interest”. Mr. Speaker, only the Canadian