

Motions

Hearings were held for a few hours and legions, if you like, of individuals and groups which wanted to have input into the process were turned away.

By the Prime Minister's own admission, this trade deal is the biggest trade deal signed, not in Canadian history, but in world history. If, as the Prime Minister has indicated, this is the biggest trade deal ever signed in world history, surely to goodness it would be appropriate to travel throughout the country this summer so that Canadians, wherever they live throughout Canada, would have an opportunity to participate in this discussion on the most important trade deal in world history.

We recognize the fact that in its present structure under the present rules and traditions the committee is unable to take the initiative to travel. That is why the Hon. Member for Essex—Windsor felt it was appropriate to move this motion so that the representatives of all the people of Canada in the House of Commons can give a clear instruction to the committee to do the honourable, decent, and correct thing, that is, to travel throughout Canada and hold hearings on what the Prime Minister himself describes as the most important trade deal in world history.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I think we should start by looking at what a committee is supposed to be. A committee is clearly a subsidiary body to which a matter is sent for consideration by a larger body. The legislative committee which is studying Bill C-130 is clearly a subsidiary body of this House. In spite of the fact that the rules with respect to parliamentary reform may give a standing or legislative committee more authority to do things of their own accord, nothing in those rules has changed the fundamental concept of what a committee is.

• (1120)

A committee, especially the committee set up to study Bill C-130, is not a totally autonomous or independent body. It is nothing more than a subsidiary body of this House, to which this House has literally committed a piece of legislation for the kind of detailed study which was concluded some time ago and cannot be given in this Chamber as a House of Commons or even as Committee of the Whole.

I make this point because the Deputy Government House Leader seems to be arguing that somehow or other, under the rules reflecting parliamentary reform, our committees have such a status that once they are set up they are somehow cut loose from any link with this Chamber and it is somehow wrong for this Chamber to try to direct or instruct such committees.

If you consider what is the concept of a committee in principle and look at what our rules say, I invite you to conclude that the Deputy Government House Leader is wrong in inviting you to decide that under our rules it is no longer possible for this House to give an instruction to a committee as to how it should conduct itself. This House has no less

authority under our current rules than it did before the rules were adopted to give an instruction to a committee.

Incidentally, I find it ironic to say the least that the Deputy Government House Leader is basing his argument on the spirit of parliamentary reform when he and his colleagues on the Government side were so quick, so ready to throw parliamentary reform out the window when it served their purpose to do so in order to suspend the calendar concept under which we have been operating for some years so that the Government could get the House to sit through the summer.

Be that as it may, if the Deputy Government House Leader is interested in parliamentary reform and has returned to the view that parliamentary reform is important and should be supported, I maintain that there is nothing in our current rules under parliamentary reform which no longer makes it possible for this House to give an instruction to a group of Members who are nothing more than a subsidiary body of this Chamber.

It has already been brought to your attention that there are precedents that clearly set out what the authority of the House is to give an instruction to a committee. I want to draw your attention to some of the content of these precedents. You have already had drawn to your attention Citation 756(1) which says:

An Instruction is a motion empowering a committee to do something which it could not otherwise do, or to direct it to do something which it might otherwise not do. It directs the order and course of the committee's proceedings and extends or restricts the order of reference according to the discretion of the House.

We already know that this committee has shown itself through the efforts of the Conservative majority unwilling to seek the permission of the House to travel. I think we have clearly reached the point where it is appropriate for the House to adopt a motion giving an instruction to the committee studying Bill C-130 to travel from place to place, to hear directly the views of Canadians, where they live, where they work, where they make their homes, about the Government's trade deal with the United States.

It is clear from looking at Citation 759(1) that the motion which the Government has challenged could not have been called much earlier and that we are now at the appropriate point in time for such a motion to be made. Citation 759(1) states:

The time for moving an Instruction is immediately after the committal of the bill, or, subsequently, as an independent motion. The Instruction should not be given while the bill is still in the possession of the House, but rather after it has come into the possession of the committee.

We are just at that point contemplated by Citation 759(1). I suggest that the motion is very much in order from the point of view of the timing of its being called for debate.

I also submit that it is quite appropriate for this motion to be called under Motions rather than to be treated as a matter of Private Members' Business. I certainly can find nothing in the precedent set out in Beauséne saying that this motion must be dealt with as Private Members' Business. I would say