

*Customs Tariff*

● (1250)

**Mr. John McDermid (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for International Trade):** Mr. Speaker, this debate today is on amendments to the customs Bill. The Liberals and the New Democrats, the socialists, are trying to turn it into a free trade debate.

**Mr. Orlikow:** It is.

**Mr. McDermid:** An entire couple of days have been spent discussing the free trade issue. I would dearly love to get into this debate but it is not a free trade debate.

**Mr. Orlikow:** Go ahead.

**Mr. McDermid:** The Hon. Member challenged me about whether we ever made a public statement on regional disparities, subsidies and so on that has taken place in the United States. Certainly, that is what the entire negotiations were about. When the Americans said, "Well you do this, this and this", Mr. Reisman and the people in the trade negotiation office were able to go right back and say, "Yes. But you do this, this and this."

**Mr. Orlikow:** Publicly?

**Mr. McDermid:** That is what negotiations are all about.

**Mr. Orlikow:** They say it publicly, we do not.

**Mr. McDermid:** Yesterday in the House I said—this is pretty public because it was Question Period—as reported in Hansard at page 11402:

It may come as a surprise to the Hon. Member to know that when we were negotiating the free trade agreement, lo and behold, the Americans had some subsidies as well that they did not want to give up.

That was in the House yesterday. The Member challenged me to point out where it was said publicly and I have just pointed it out to him.

**Mr. Orlikow:** Once.

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski):** The Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) on debate.

**Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier):** I would willingly defer to the Parliamentary Secretary, but since I am being invited to speak to this amendment I will gladly do so. This is an amendment to clause 32 of an Act respecting the imposition of duties of customs and other charges, to give effect to the International Convention on the Harmonized Commodity System, and so forth. I will spare you the long title of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, clause 22 has to do with the accountability of the Government or the public administration and Parliament. This clause relates particularly to the ratification of any resolution or any decision under which certain imported goods would be subject to duties.

[*English*]

The purpose of the amendment, if I understand it properly, is to cut from 180 days, which is I think the present situation, to 60 days the time government orders relative to tariffs can have effect before they require ratification by a resolution of Parliament. These deal with accountability. It does not deal—and I agree with the Parliamentary Secretary—with anything to do with the present Canada-U.S. relations in regard to free trade or the so-called Mulroney—Reagan trade deal. It does deal with accountability. That is why I stand up, because I think over the years I have made the point that we should receive from Governments, on a regular basis, accountable reports as to how Ministers run the country.

[*Translation*]

Under the proposed amendment, Mr. Speaker, the Government would have only 60 instead of 180 days, and we suggest this would make for stricter control, better accountability, greater participation of the House in the administration of the country, and would provide Hon. Members with an opportunity to become familiar with a very complicated process.

[*English*]

Clause 23 allows the Government to extend or withdraw what was called most-favoured-nation tariffs. These tariffs are applied to any goods that originate in a country to which the general tariff applies. Normally it is set at about 35 per cent, which is a pretty high tariff. It applies to few countries that do not have essentially a very important trading relationship with Canada. The 35 per cent rate of tariff is so punitive that very few goods can get into Canada. Therefore, in order to gain access, these countries must negotiate for most-favoured-nations status for the goods they wish to sell in Canada or, alternatively, give Canada some reciprocal concessions. Hence this section does not deal strictly with the Canada—U.S. free trade negotiations. Nonetheless it permits the principle of parliamentary accountability to be argued.

I believe strongly that this is a well intentioned amendment. It is one that I think is done in the spirit of trying to get the Government to be more responsive to Parliament. I think it is what one might call a friendly amendment in trying to get parliamentarians more interested and, possibly through them, the public more involved in deciding what will happen with our tariffs and how we exclude or allow certain goods to be imported into this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, this proposition is supported by another amendment, amendment No. 12, and if I got it right amendments Nos. 4 and 12 are being debated together. Amendment No. 12 deals with another subject. It reads as follows:

That Bill C-87, be amended in Clause 61 by striking out line 3 at page 22 and substituting the following therefor:

"sixtieth day from the day"

It is almost Greek to me. If we read this in the context of the amendment it is difficult to understand, so during the few