

the Government and the Opposition perhaps some discussions might correct the matter.

INTERJECTION BY MEMBER

Mr. Blaine A. Thacker (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's *Hansard* at page 11760 contains factual errors on the part of the Hon. Member for York South—Weston (Mr. Nunziata) and the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) as to my interjection. The statement by the Hon. Member for Athabasca (Mr. Shields) on that same page sets out exactly what I said, and I stand behind that comment.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

WAYS AND MEANS

EXCISE TAX ACT

Hon. Harvie Andre (for Minister of State for Finance) moved that a Ways and Means Motion to amend the Excise Tax Act, laid upon the Table on Monday, December 14, be concurred in.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: On division.

Motion agreed to.

* * *

TRADE

CANADA—U.S. FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Miss Carney that this House endorse, as being in the national interest, the Canada—United States Free Trade Agreement, the legal text of which was tabled in the House of Commons on Friday, December 11, 1987.

Mr. Speaker: I wish to draw to the attention of the House that I have received an amendment to the main motion on the free trade motion moved by the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy) seconded by the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia).

I think it has been indicated to the appropriate Members in the New Democratic Party and in the Official Opposition that I have some difficulty procedurally with the proposed amendment. I will read it to the House:

That the motion be amended by inserting immediately after the comma following the word "interest" the following:

"as determined by the people of Canada in a general election".

Free Trade

I think it has also been indicated that I would want to hear some argument on this matter before making my decision. I recognize the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy).

Mr. Lloyd Axworthy: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your bringing this matter to our attention and asking for guidance.

I think the amendment was drafted certainly in recognition of the various precedents that have been established in the House in which we are not to set out any conditions of approval for the endorsement called for in the amendment but rather to clearly define the concept of "national interest". I think Your Honour would recognize that that is a definition that probably has as many interpretations as there are citizens in the country. The Government used the phrase, not us. The Government said, "in the national interest".

Over the years we have defined that there is only one way of ultimately deciding the national interest and that is through the democratic process, by way of an election. Other than that it becomes an academic debate, a matter of bias or interpretation as to what is in the national interest.

As you will read the Government's motion, it says endorsing the trade agreement because it is in Canada's national interest. We are saying by way of our amendment that the most appropriate way of defining that is through an election itself. It is not a matter of the condition of endorsement, it is a way of demonstrating how this House would have to provide a further clarification or interpretation of the words "national interest" and we would not presume that the Liberal Party's interpretation would necessarily be omniscient or all prevailing. We would want to have recourse to the election to decide that.

You will find during the course of the debate on this motion various interpretations of the national interest being put forward. Even in the sovereign rights of this Parliament to decide that, the Government does not make any effort to decide it, so we are simply saying that the amendment is a way of taking the Government's prescription, namely, that the trade agreement must be in the national interest, and providing a way in which that interest in honourable traditions of the parliamentary system can most effectively and adequately be described and defined.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. The Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis).

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, having studied the amendment put forward by the Official Opposition to the motion before us, it seems to me that upon examination of the general conditions which apply to amendments to make them admissible, three different criteria are involved. First, obviously an amendment must be relevant to the question in the motion. In this case that certainly is the case, particularly recognizing the words of my hon. friend from Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy). Second, that if not proposing an alternative, an amendment must modify a question in order to increase its acceptability. I