

Customs Tariff

● (1240)

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I support the position taken by the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy). As he indicated, and as I said a while ago, we are not dealing with a normal situation. We are not dealing with a time when these changes in tariffs were fairly routine or when a great deal of discretion was left to the Government to change the schedules by Order in Council with little discussion in Parliament. It is our contention that the free trade agreement between Canada and the United States has changed the situation in a very fundamental way. For a few moments I will continue with the points I was trying to make with regard to how that changes the situation for Canadian farmers.

When Mr. Reisman said that agriculture was not affected because supply management and marketing boards were not mentioned, I meant it when I said that in my view and in the view of many farmers he was, to say the least, not telling the whole story. He was, to say the least, shading the truth. While supply management and marketing boards are not mentioned, the fact is that another part of the agreement removes the tariffs which Canada has traditionally put on processed foods.

Our chicken, turkey, egg, and other dairy producers operate under a supply management system through marketing boards. They are guaranteed, in return for agreeing to produce within a quota system, a price for their products which permits them to continue. It gives them the ability to continue. American producers do not have that system. Because American producers of chicken, turkey, and eggs have better weather, a larger market, subsidies for grain, and so on, they can sell their product cheaper than can Canadian producers. Their chickens, turkeys, and eggs can be processed into TV dinners, chicken pot pies, and chicken fingers for shipment to Canada and sold at a cheaper price than Canadian products.

I have checked that assertion or claim with leaders of the marketing boards in Manitoba and with the leaders of Keystone Agriculture, who are very cautious, conservative, good business types. I have also checked it with senior economists in the University of Manitoba Faculty of Agriculture. They agree with my description of how the system will work after the free trade agreement is signed. It is just one illustration of the importance of the agreement and the absolute necessity for Canadians to know what is in it.

I think it is ominous that we are in December and we still do not have the text of the agreement which was signed and announced with such fanfare and joy by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in October. A couple of days ago we received a circular telling us that we could have the various documents when they were available. We are talking about hundreds of pages, perhaps several thousands of them. They will be very detailed, technical documents. How can Canadians, who will either benefit or be affected adversely, judge what will be the effect on them when they do not have the relevant documents?

I talked about the effect it would have on some farmers. Despite the fact that the Americans signed an agreement back in October, they are apparently insisting that the protection of their shipping industry under the Jones Act—and it has been given a great deal of protection against shipping industries of all other countries—shall continue. Talk about government procurement. They have innumerable laws which protect American companies and corporations in the area of procurement by the federal Government of the United States and by state Governments.

As far as we know, there is nothing in the agreement which will restrict their rights. I am told that when American negotiators were challenged on this point, they made very clear that they had no legal authority to restrict the ability of American states or American cities to adopt procurement laws and regulations which give advantages to American producers.

One criticism of Canadian practices which was discussed—and we were made to look bad, as if the things we were doing were improper and immoral—was the assistance given by the Conservative Government and by the Government of Quebec to General Motors to modernize and upgrade its plant at Ste. Thérèse. Somehow we were doing something that was improper. However, there has not been a new automobile plant built in the United States in the last four years or five years that has not been built with a contribution of hundreds of millions of dollars by the state or city in which it was built.

Mr. McDermid: So? What is the point?

Mr. Orlikow: The Parliamentary Secretary asks, “What is the point?” The point is a precise one, and I wish the Parliamentary Secretary would take the opportunity to deal with it. We are being criticized by the Americans for our regional development policies and told that we must change those policies—

Mr. McDermid: They have their own.

Mr. Orlikow: Exactly.

Mr. McDermid: They cannot touch ours.

Mr. Orlikow: I have yet to hear the Prime Minister, the Minister for International Trade (Miss Carney), the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson), or the Parliamentary Secretary say publicly in Canada to the American Congress, to the American negotiators, or to the American people: “Look, you are asking us to change our regional development policies. You have the same kinds of policies and you have to change yours”.

I challenge the Parliamentary Secretary to put on record one statement which he or any other government representative has made that criticized or challenged the Americans on the basis of the fact that they are doing precisely what they are calling on us to stop doing. I see my time is up, Mr. Speaker.