

Customs Tariff

It is unthinkable that we should not accede to the request of the premier of a province for an explanation from D'Iberville Fortier, who is a servant of Parliament and of this House.

My Party has taken a clear stand on this question, as have the Liberals and the NDP. Mr. Speaker, please don't tell me we will have to listen to Mr. Fortier in committee or somewhere else! It is in this House, under the TV lights, that we shall explain to Canadians that under Section 91 of the British North America Act, the federal Government, and especially Parliament, shall not interfere in areas under provincial jurisdiction.

Many Members of this House support my request for this debate. I am sure that out of respect for our institutions, the provinces and ourselves, we would like to debate the subject immediately. However, according to our Standing Orders, there can be no immediate debate.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore ask you to agree to a debate at eight o'clock this evening, and I promise it will finish at seven o'clock tomorrow morning, at the latest.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore move, under Standing order 29, that this House be now adjourned to proceed with the consideration of statements made by the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada.

Mr. Speaker: First of all, I am sorry, but originally I said this was a question to be raised according to the usual procedure, like a question of privilege. However, it is not a clear question of privilege but a request under Standing Order 29.

I think we can say that of course this is a very important issue for all Canadians and especially for Canadians in the province of Quebec and Francophones outside Quebec. A servant of this House has made some very interesting statements which during the weekend were the subject of a great deal of debate.

However, according to the Standing Orders it is up to the Chair to decide. I listened very carefully to the Hon. Member. The question he raised is a very timely one which, as I said before, concerns many Canadians. However I must advise him that on procedural grounds I cannot allow this kind of debate because, in my opinion, Standing Order 29 does not provide for this. I would suggest that the Hon. Member might more effectively follow through on his remarks by making representations to the Joint Committee on the Official Languages. After all, it is important and necessary that Hon. Members have a very clear understanding of the purpose of Standing Order 29, especially when another forum is available for debate. We do have an important problem, and it should be raised before the committee. I understand the feelings of the Hon. Member, just as I understand the significance of the subject. I would urge the Hon. Member and all his colleagues in the House to accept my ruling because I think it is in keeping with the Standing Orders.

• (1120)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CUSTOMS TARIFF

MEASURE TO AMEND

Hon. Don Mazankowski (for Minister of Finance) moved: That Bill C-118, an Act to amend the Customs Tariff, be now read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

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

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Richard Grisé (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members may have noticed that the Bill under consideration today is not very long, but still Canadian companies and individuals think it is important. If the Bill is adopted we will be in a position to amend the Customs Tariff tabled by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wislon) last February 10 when he presented his Budget.

Most of these tariff amendments will result in reducing or eliminating duty on equipment not available from production in Canada: specified machinery used by the oil-sands producing industry, certain compressors and differentials for automotive vehicles, steel rods used in the construction of silos, unrecorded magnetic tapes used to make cassettes for the blind, certain model kits, and burial shrouds. Some of the amendments are of a purely technical nature, for they simply continue to guarantee duty-free entry of equipment which was not subject to duties before the February 10 Budget, including among others facsimile transmission apparatus and diesel engines used in certain construction equipment.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments are among the least voluminous tariff measures introduced in recent Budgets. This Bill is substantially different from Bill C-87 proclaimed on December 24, 1987, which was one of the most important Bills the House had to consider. Naturally, it dealt with tariffs, but its main purpose was to review the whole customs tariff to ensure its consistency with the international harmonized goods designation and codification system.

Mr. Speaker, the development and implementation of the new harmonized system, which required massive resource investments from the business sector, without mentioning public expenditures, explain in large part the relatively small number of tariff amendment requests requiring the introduction of legislation to have been submitted to the Minister of Finance since the tabling of the 1987 Budget. I believe that this situation is also due to the fact that manufacturers, importers and other business people have focussed all their attention on the Free Trade Agreement with the United States. As Hon. Members already know, the agreement provides for the elimination of all tariffs imposed by Canada