

Mr. Speaker: We will now continue with the discussions that started this morning with respect to the procedural aspects of the Bill which is on the Order Paper. I will hear further from the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy).

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA-UNITED STATES FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

MEASURE TO ENACT

On the Order: Second reading and Reference:

May 24, 1988—Mr. Crosbie—Bill C-130, an Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the United States.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the generosity of the Chair in allowing me to complete my argument on this particular point.

The summation I would like to make, and I think is important, is that the bill itself in its enormity, complexity, and coverage of so many aspects, requires Parliament to establish in a sense a working order that is appropriate to the measure in front of us. I will point out, by way of example, that when the U.S. Congress was commissioned to examine its implementing legislation on the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, it transferred jurisdiction to the judiciary committee, to look at the dispute settlement mechanism; to the finance committee, to look at economic aspects; and to the agriculture committee, to look at areas of competence in agriculture. In other words, Congress on both the Senate and the House of Representatives sides has under its purview a series of segregated areas of examination and review. It was then brought back together in a report to the administration.

Under this system the Americans were able, therefore, to direct and focus public examination which was conducted by way of public hearings in different parts of the United States. We are simply saying that it would be only fair and proper that Parliament conduct itself accordingly under the same type of clear obligation to ensure that we have that kind of examination.

I simply go back to the precedent that I think we are arguing. It was established by Speaker Lamoureux in 1971. Where do we stop with omnibus Bills? That is the question he put. The case I want to make is that here is the place at which we can draw the line. Clearly, the enormity of the task and the requirement to respond to Canadian public interest in the Bill requires us to have a grouping of arrangements, several different pieces of legislation, that lend themselves to a clear division of responsibility.

If one turns to Bill C-130 one sees clearly that there is a grouping of areas dealing with finance, the dispute settlement

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mechanism, as well as with culture and with customs and tariffs. Thus this Bill would lend itself to four or five pieces of legislation in a natural way. That would allow the committee to work.

The point I now wish to make is an important point for Your Honour to consider. If an omnibus Bill is brought before a legislative committee, as the Government is talking about, of only seven members to deal with a Bill of this enormity, first, it is putting enormous burden on those seven members to come to grips with all the wide variety of points of view. Second, on a committee of that small size there is only one member from each of the Opposition Parties. That puts an impossible task on the Opposition Parties to give proper coverage to a Bill of this size and complexity. Therefore this argues the fact that we have a standing committee system in which there has been a well-developed sense of expertise.

There has been a commitment in the House for the last three or four years to give more accent and emphasis to the roles of committees. Here is a proper way in which we can show how the standing committee system and the committee system itself can be put to good use on behalf of the Canadian public.

Mr. Speaker, I go back to the words of your predecessor, Speaker Lamoureux, to say that we have in front of us now a clear place in which Parliament can take the statement that was made by your predecessor in 1971, and the clear precedent that was established during the 1982 debate on energy. In that debate there was an agreement by the House to split the Bill on one sector of the economy into several Bills, and we can now firmly establish the precedent by taking a Bill of this magnitude and requiring the Government to bring in several pieces of legislation to ensure, above all, that Canadians will have an opportunity to make their case and that Parliament will exercise its dual function as a forum of public debate.

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): In making the points I would like in this debate, I keep in mind the Parliamentary Secretary's comments that what we are doing is not debating the legislation but attempting to offer to you, Mr. Speaker, some guidance, some suggestions, with respect to the issue.

My House Leader, this morning, put before Your Honour a very detailed outline of precedents which I will not attempt to repeat. The argument made by Mr. Speaker Lamoureux in his statements with respect to Bill C-107 were particularly important in relation to what I wish to contribute to your deliberations, Mr. Speaker.

● (1510)

In this case Speaker Lamoureux was dealing with a piece of legislation that sought to amend some 18 or 19 statutes, and he made these important points:

—where do we stop? Where is the point of no return? The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, and I believe the hon. member for Edmonton West, said that we might reach the point where we would have only one bill, a bill at