

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

There is a very important paragraph entitled "Guidelines for Selection". I want to read it because it is very important for this debate. It reads:

The Speaker will not normally select for consideration by the House any motion previously ruled out of order in committee and will normally only select motions which were not or could not be presented in committee. A motion, previously defeated in committee, will only be selected if the Speaker judges it to be of such exceptional significance as to warrant a further consideration at the report stage. The Speaker will not normally select for separate debate, a repetitive series of motions which are interrelated and in making the selection, shall consider whether individual Members will be able to express their concerns during the debate on another motion.

The reason I bring this matter to the attention of the House is that it is the Chair's decision whether there will be amendments in the House at report stage, in many cases, because a lot of the amendments are repetitive. Indeed, if the Government has its way in committee, there would only be friendly amendments to the Government's legislation. No other amendments would be allowed because of the numbers the Government has and because of the pressure it puts on the single members of the committee who may be Liberal or New Democrat. Of course, the Government gets its way every time without any discussion and it carries the day.

Therefore, I am saying in this procedural argument that I think the Government must show some understanding of the need to increase the numbers on the legislative committee from the practice in the last couple of years of seven to possibly triple or quadruple that number.

I see the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Andre) is here and I want to address some of the difficulties we see with the omnibus Bill. I, for one, believe that Bill C-130 is a hodgepodge of some 27 statutes which conveniently were put together and grouped and will be presented in the House. Come any eventuality, the Government will have its way, even using closure, as the Minister for International Trade (Mr. Crosbie) has threatened. I want to quote from the debate in 1982. It may not be very relevant to say that the precedent created in 1982 should apply today. I was here in the House at that time. I sat in the Chair at night. The bells rang for two solid weeks. I think the House settled that issue when a compromise was reached to split the Bill into eight separate Bills. It was not the Speaker's decision. The House agreed to make that compromise.

In those days, the Hon. Member for Calgary Centre the present Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, was quoted in *Hansard* on March 2, 1982. He said about the national energy Bill: "It is an incredible hodgepodge and mismatch of disparate items". He went on to say: "There is no protection in this Chamber from the tyranny of the majority". He then topped all his statements by saying: "Wide-ranging pieces of legislation, so-called omnibus Bills, cannot be debated properly because they cover too many topics". That is the point. Omnibus Bills can't be debated properly because they cover too many topics.

If I had time and you had patience, Mr. Speaker, I would read the number of Bills which will be amended, starting with

the Canada Agricultural Products Standards Act, Department of Agriculture Act, Bank Act, Broadcasting Act and so on.

The issue was well put by the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy) when he said all these Bills, which are as distinct from one another as night and day, are all grouped within this so-called omnibus Bill and are amended by Bill C-130. In fact, there are Bills listed which have not been passed by this House. I refer to Bill C-110 which just received second reading and was sent to a committee on April 28, 1988. That Bill has not been adopted by the House but is being amended by Bill C-130. One wonders what kind of game we are playing when even Bills which have not been adopted are being amended by Bill C-130.

I do not like the idea that no amendments can be brought forth. I do not like the idea of this omnibus Bill approach. I think it plays against normal democratic practices. I would hope that in your judgment, Mr. Speaker, you would rule the Bill unacceptable and would propose to the Government a course of action which would be more in keeping with democratic principles and thorough debate. I would hope the Government would see the light of day and come in with possibly a split—

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): A split is not enough.

Mr. Gauthier: Perhaps my House Leader could meet with the Government House Leader and come to some kind of agreement as to what the Government can do. We are not opposing the Government's right to introduce legislation. Indeed, the Government can propose and we will dispose. However, we are asking the Government to come to terms with us, do the sensible thing, meet with the House Leaders and come to terms with respect to a compromise, a good compromise which would offer us a guarantee of debate and possibly ensure better legislation.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member.

Mr. John McDermid (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the Opposition has attacked Bill C-130 on the grounds it is procedurally objectionable because it is an omnibus Bill. It has quoted Speaker Lamoureux from 1971 and the 1982 National Energy Program omnibus Bill as precedents. I would like to show, Mr. Speaker, that in my humble opinion they are wrong. To do so, I will focus my remarks on two points. The free trade Bill puts one clear question before the House of Commons, whether or not to approve the free trade agreement. Second, the free trade Bill is not only procedurally in order but also the best way to proceed.

Before I address those two points, however, I would like to speak briefly to two preliminary issues. The first issue is whether or not this Bill is an omnibus Bill. That is, in my view, not the issue here. It is a matter of semantics. We on this side think the Bill is not an omnibus Bill at all. However, even if it were, it would not, for that reason alone, be procedurally