

Free Trade

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell (Mr. Boudria) says that I am being kind. He has been the beneficiary of much kindness and will be again, provided that he sums up in a succinct manner, as I know he can.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to get into a debate on whether it is a good idea or a bad idea to have the agreement. I intend to address that later in debate rather than on this point of order.

With regard to the admissibility of the amendment as proposed by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy), it is clear that my colleague has offered an amendment to the motion that is very much in keeping with the spirit of the main motion. In other words, my colleague has not offered an amendment that is contrary to the views expressed in the main motion, notwithstanding the fact that we will address that issue in debate later.

We have moved an amendment to add words after “the national interest”. We know that Governments have signed such agreements in the past without qualifying them as being in the national interest in a motion in this House.

The amendment offered by my colleague is not to disagree that it is in the national interest; it is merely to define something which the Government has injected into the debate. We could make an argument right now as to whether the words “national interest” should be in the motion. If one were to listen attentively to what our colleagues on the government side have said, one could conclude that they have actually argued that the words “national interest” should not even appear in the Government’s motion.

However, we are not debating whether that should be the case. We are debating whether, having recognized that the words “national interest” can be in the main motion, an amendment offered to further define what that national interest is is indeed in order. The Government could argue that it disagrees on whether or not this would further the national interest. That is a point of debate, not necessarily a point of order.

On page 397 of Erskine May, Twentieth Edition, it reads:

The Speaker has ruled that an amendment to add another subject for inquiry to a question declaring the expediency of establishing a tribunal for the purpose of inquiring into a definite matter of urgent public importance, under the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act, 1921, would not be relevant—

I agree that if that were the case today, it should be judged in a similar manner. However, today we have not asked for an amendment to add another subject for inquiry. We are not moving that the motion should read that, as opposed to having free trade, we should have multilateral trade, or something which would add another level of debate. We are keeping it at the same level. We are merely offering a motion which would further define the Government’s motion.

As I have said, if one were to read the representations made by the Deputy Government House Leader, and, in particular, the Member for Annapolis Valley—Hants (Mr. Nowlan), one

would likely conclude that they were speaking against having the words “national interest” in the main motion.

That is a debate which we could perhaps have had but have not chosen to address at this time. Because we are not now disagreeing with that being part of the motion—we will disagree with that in debate—I do not believe that the Government is justified in using that as a reason to disqualify the amendment which we have moved to the main motion.

Mr. Speaker: I will recognize the Hon. Member for York South—Weston for (Nunziata) for a very brief remark.

Mr. Nunziata: Mr. Speaker, I am so persuaded by the submissions made by my colleague and friend, the Hon. Member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell (Mr. Boudria), that I wish to add a few remarks to the point which is being argued.

I look at the motion before us today and ask for the reason which the Government is presenting the motion. The motion reads:

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.

● (1600)

Canadians are asking why it is necessary to present this motion and to have this motion voted upon in the House of Commons. I have consulted with some resident experts and they advise me that there is no legal or constitutional requirement to have this motion carried. It seems to me that, if there is no legal requirement to have this motion presented and voted upon in the House, why is the Government presenting this motion?

I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that it is mere puffery. The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) would like to visit President Ronald Reagan on January 2, 1988, and say to him, “Here we have the endorsement of the Parliament of Canada”.

I notice you are on the edge of your seat, Mr. Speaker, which might suggest to me that you are about to cut short my submission.

I would like to conclude my submission by pointing out that because this motion is not in any legal form, by accepting the amendment in no way are you, Mr. Speaker, affecting any legal requirement. I should also point out that the Government has chosen to use the word “endorse” rather than “ratify”. I suggest that there is some significance to the fact that the Government has chosen the word “endorse” over the word “ratify”.

Mr. Speaker: I know that Hon. Members would not want the debate to go on beyond its very useful part. I would ask the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) to respect the wishes of the Chair to close off debate at this time.

I have heard the arguments, which have been succinctly and well put, and also made with authority. I will take them into