

Customs Tariff

Although the Government is establishing a new economic union, or as the President of the United States has called it, a new economic constitution, the Government does not have a mandate to establish free trade. It is important that Parliament controls the economy of the country, the exports from the country and imports into the country, more than it will be able to do under the economic union which is being suggested.

As I have pointed out, the Tories lack the mandate to do what they are doing. They do not have support in the polls to do this. They are changing their position. Traditionally they have opposed such an economic union, and that is the basis on which people thought they were electing them. Only five of the provinces have said that they would approve the free trade agreement and two of those provinces, Saskatchewan under Premier Devine and British Columbia under Premier Vander Zalm, do not have a clear mandate to take that position on behalf of the people of their provinces.

Rather than belabour this issue, I will sit down so that we can proceed to the next order of business.

Miss Aideen Nicholson (Trinity): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak on Bill C-87 with regard to the harmonized tariff system. Under ordinary circumstances the Bill would have been treated as a technical one which simply put in place the legal framework for many years of negotiations. It took on a different flavour, however, after an incredibly insensitive statement made by the Minister of State for Finance (Mr. Hockin) in the House. Less than an hour after debate had commenced he objected to opposition Members asking questions about the content of the Bill.

On December 1, as reported at page 11349 of *Hansard* the Minister said "—the free trade agreement we are putting together with the United States is designed to achieve—". He then went on to say that that would make motions produced by the Opposition unnecessary. The Minister continued:

The rules of origin will be stated in detail in our trading agreement with the United States, and will completely rule out the possibility of the concerns . . . produced by the Hon. Member for Humber—Port-au-Port—St. Barbe.

In other words, in response to the very legitimate concerns raised by my colleague, the Member for Humber—Port-au-Port—St. Barbe (Mr. Tobin), the Minister of State was saying that we should not worry, that we should pass this Bill and we will find our answers in an agreement which we had not yet seen but which may be produced in the House in the next week.

● (1240)

Naturally, Mr. Speaker, that was not a statement that was very well received by parliamentarians. However, today the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) has tabled in the House the agreement in question, the Canada-U.S. agreement, although Members of Parliament have not yet seen it, which is very interesting. It was tabled at 12 p.m., and an hour later, what we have in our lobbies are volumes of tariff descriptions but

not the basic agreement. Apparently, that is still on its way to us.

Nevertheless, since the agreement has finally been made public, obviously the debate on the agreement will now proceed on that basis next week. Therefore, we are at liberty to return today to dealing with Bill C-87, as a technical Bill.

It is a Bill that has been negotiated over many years. At the present time, because of the enormous range of products Canada imports from around the world—everything from fruit and vegetables to television sets—Canada Customs now processes seven million separate import declarations every year in order to collect more than \$6 billion in duties and taxes. Canada and its major trading partners, the United States, Japan and the European Economic Community, have after many years of negotiation agreed to implement a new way of coding imported goods which will be based on international standards known as the harmonized commodity description and coding system.

This involves for Canada a fundamental revision of the customs tariff, but theoretically, at the end of the day, we would have a very much faster and more efficient method of dealing with imports. So on January 1 Canada Customs and Excise will start a new system which is based on the most massive overhaul in the history of the custom's clearance process.

The harmonized system of coding goods is the product of 13 years' work by the 56 countries that are members of the Customs Co-operation Council. Also within Canada there has been considerable consultation with trade associations, importers, customs brokers and so on. The computerized network which will make this whole new system work is being called bravely by Customs and Excise RMD, release on minimum documentation. The aim, indeed, is to make the system simpler for the user.

The RMD program will allow importers or their brokers who have previously arranged account security with the Department to have their shipments quickly cleared through customs on presentation of minimal documentation, usually just a cargo control document and an unrated invoice. This change will separate clearly the release of goods from the presentation and review of detailed accounting data and so will reduce the paper work required in order to get release of goods.

Also a new system is being set up called the customs automated data exchange, which is a direct link between Customs and the offices of brokers and importers. Under this new system, data, which must be presented for accounting and statistical reasons five days following the release of goods can be transmitted directly from computer to computer. We are told the CADEX system, as it has been called, the customs automated data exchange, will be implemented as of January 1, 1988.