

*Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*

Mr. Speaker, you are the first elected Speaker of this House, and from more than a year's experience, I would say that you are an excellent Speaker and take the Standing Orders of the House very seriously, especially S.O. 1, which may well be our most important standing order, which provides, and I quote:

1. In all cases not provided for hereinafter, or by other Order of the House, procedural questions shall be decided by the Speaker or Chairman, whose decisions shall be based on the usages, forms, customs and precedents of the House of Commons of Canada and on parliamentary tradition in Canada and other jurisdictions, so far as they may be applicable to the House.

Mr. Speaker, as I see it, it is up to the Chair to protect the minority and to prevent the overwhelming majority on the Government side from ignoring our position and using the sheer weight of numbers to impose their preferences. We intend to have an attentive, serious and full debate on this Bill, but we want to do so in a spirit of common sense, and we also want it understood that we are considering one Bill at a time, not a mishmash of bills lumped together under the umbrella of an omnibus bill.

Mr. Speaker, in response to a petition I tabled in the House in March 1988, the Minister for International Trade at the time replied, with respect to the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, that the enabling legislation for the free trade agreement would be tabled shortly in the House of Commons, and that all Members would have an opportunity, on behalf of all Canadians, to consider the agreement and to make their views known. The Minister went on to give me a fairly exhaustive reply, largely government propaganda about the excellent reasons for their initiative and why the Mulroney-Reagan deal was so important.

Mr. Speaker, I have two or three points I would like to raise today. The first one, obviously, concerns the comments of the Minister of State and Minister of State (Treasury Board) who is also the Minister responsible for the business of the House (Mr. Lewis), who told us this morning . . .

● (1600)

[English]

I took down verbatim what he said: "Opportunities for Members to vote would be there". My question is: When would we have the opportunity to debate the so-called measures involved in Bill C-130?

I am not telling you anything new, Mr. Speaker, when I say that the Bill consists of 123 pages and amends 27 federal statutes. Indeed, we believe that the Bill should be broken up into various Bills incorporating each and every one of the statutes under discussion.

I was impressed by an article in *The Globe and Mail* this morning, written by Hugh Winsor, in which he analyses the Government's strategy in dealing with the Meech Lake Accord, the abortion issue and free trade. He has a point well taken when talking about this new economic constitution that

the Government is trying to pass on to Canadians. Let me quote from the article:

On the free-trade enabling bill, International Trade Minister John Crosbie has made it clear that all he wants from Parliament is a rubber stamp, and he is prepared to use closure to get it. 'We're going to have Parliament make a decision. That's what parliamentarians are elected for: to make decisions.'

Mr. Winsor goes on to say:

Really? If the only purpose of being a member of Parliament is to be a trained seal clapping for the decisions taken by Cabinet, we will be lucky if we can get a full slate of candidates for the next election.

He goes on to explain that it is important that debate take place and that it be thorough, democratic and allowed to take its course.

I was particularly upset with the proposal that no amendments to the deal are possible because that would disturb our American friends. The Minister also proposed this morning that indeed the committee will have the possibility to make amendments which can always be brought back to the House at report stage. I want to deal with that committee stage because that is the main purpose of my rising today.

Since the reform of the rules of the House, it has been the custom that legislative committees are made up of about seven members of the House. Standing Order 95(1) authorizes the striking committee, of which I am a member along with the Government Whip and New Democratic Party Whip, to name more than seven and up to a maximum of 30 Members to constitute a legislative committee.

Since the Government sets the number of members it will have on its committee, keeping in mind the proportions of representation in the House, it has been our response to have only one member of the Liberal Party and one from the New Democratic Party on most of these legislative committees. That makes it very difficult.

I want to ask the Government sincerely if we could not come to an amicable agreement in the striking committee for Bill C-130 where the Government would accept more members—indeed possibly raise it to 30 members—and give the Opposition a little more room and say in the committee with the intent of providing a thorough debate. Once this has been accepted as a *modus operandi*, I think it would re-establish a sort of trust between the Opposition and the Government.

It is quite possible to make amendments to the Bill in terms of the wording and the substance of the Bill. I refer you, Mr. Speaker, to Standing Order 114(10) which is quite explicit. It reads:

● (1610)

The Speaker shall have power to select or combine amendments or clauses to be proposed at the report stage and may, if he or she thinks fit, call upon any Member who has given notice of an amendment to give such explanation of the subject of the amendment as may enable the Speaker to form a judgment upon it.