

Free Trade

the phrase "the national interest" or to clarify its meaning, is somehow out of order. We are offering an amendment to define the national interest, or to suggest a way of defining the national interest. If the Government had wanted to avoid an amendment in the terms offered by the Official Opposition, then the Government should not have presented a motion with the phrase "the national interest" in it.

Having presented a motion containing the words "the national interest" as an additional concept to approving the agreement, then I respectfully submit that the Government itself has opened the door to the acceptability of amendments which might not otherwise have been acceptable in so far as they refer to the phrase or concept "the national interest".

I respectfully submit that the situation may well have been different if the phrase "the national interest" had not been placed in the motion by the Government. Having done so, it cannot now argue that the amendment, intended to define or clarify the concept of "the national interest", is somehow inadmissible. Again, I respectfully urge you, Mr. Speaker, to accept the amendment as being admissible, related as it is to the phrase "the national interest" which the Government itself has placed in the motion which, therefore, makes it not simply a motion to approve the free trade agreement but makes it something more and, therefore, more subject to amendment than would otherwise be the case.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, I want to add some points of view to the points raised by the House Leader for the Official Opposition. The Government, of course, we all recognize, did not have to put the term "national interest" into the text of the motion. The Government choosing to do that simply raises the question, what is the national interest? The Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy) in his amendment has attempted to define one way of determining that.

The reason this becomes a rather critical issue is the assumption in the motion that the agreement reached by the Canadian-United States negotiators is in fact an agreement that is in the national interest. I want to remind you, Mr. Speaker, in our deliberations on this, that the present Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark), in the leadership race running up to the last federal election, opposed on the record the notion of a free trade deal with the United States.

Mr. Andre: What does that have to do with this point of order?

• (1550)

Mr. Riis: The relationship to the point of order is that the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Mulroney) is on record as opposing the idea and concept of a free trade deal with the United States. The issue before us was never even debated in the last federal election campaign. No Canadian who cast his or her ballot for the Conservative Party of Canada did so with the notion that the Government may enter into a free trade deal with the United States.

The question is on what basis the Government makes the assumption that this is in the national interest. The Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry is attempting to indicate that the way we determine national interest in a democratic parliamentary society is through a national election.

This is very critical. If we assume that this trade deal is automatically in the national interest when there has been no election on free trade, one could make the case to the contrary that the assumption of the electorate of Canada was that the Prime Minister and his senior cabinet Ministers were opposed to the notion because that point was made on the public record.

I submit that this amendment is not only in order but is moved in the spirit of attempting to clarify an issue which, we would all agree, is very important. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to be flexible in your ruling, particularly when you consider that we could offer points of view on the admissibility of the motion which is before us. However, I will put that aside with the assumption that it is not needed. We all recognize how important this issue is and that we need a full and complete debate on it. We certainly need to know precisely what we are debating. This amendment is at least a step toward clarifying the whole issue.

Mr. McKenzie: Mr. Speaker, it has been indicated in this debate that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) said in 1983 that they were opposed to free trade. The whole situation has changed since 1983. In 1982 the Liberal Government appointed a royal commission to examine the economy and make recommendations. This study, cost Canadian taxpayers \$24 million. The report tabled in 1985 recommended that Canada enter into negotiations for free trade with the United States. After reading a \$24 million study the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister started thinking again. Many people were opposed to free trade and many people did not have a position on it because they knew nothing about it. However, if you reads the Macdonald report you will support free trade.

The Prime Minister commissioned the Flynn-Hockin committee to hold committee meetings across the country. In 1986 it recommended that Canada can only lose by introducing retaliatory protectionist measures but cannot stand by and do nothing with a modest and dispersed population. It said that Canada must have access to the markets of the world and be able to sell in these markets if it is to prosper. For this reason the committee recommended that we get into free trade discussions. That is why everyone changed their minds.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Assiniboine (Mr. McKenzie) has given some views as to why the motion ought to be supported. However, that is getting us a little bit away from the procedural point.

Mr. Boudria: You're being kind.