

Foreign Takeovers Review Act

thing to the effect that "changes in realities are more important than changes in the law". I think it is a pity that Montesquieu is not here to see some of the nonsense that goes on and perhaps if he were here he would say that the reality is that there is very little change in the law and very little change in our mores.

The debate in Parliament and the country about the very large foreign presence in the Canadian economy, and the capacity of Canada to make her own decisions about Canadian economic policy, is surely in no way joined by Bill C-201, the Foreign Takeover Review Act. The bill we are considering today has been variously described in the following terms, some of which have been trotted out by the minister himself, I suppose in anticipation of what we will say in this debate. It has been described as "one big zero", as being a surprisingly modest first step, as being just plain modest, as being hesitant, as being a little nibble, of failing to come to grips, of being weak and so on. I have exhausted my energy, but I can assure you that the record is filled with adjectives about the bill. One of the most interesting appeared in the *New York Times* which said that "the reaction of American business is one of satisfaction". This must surely rank as one of the understatements of this year.

If I read the newspapers correctly, the Minister of National Revenue has announced, and the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce alluded to this a minute ago, that there will be meetings with provincial premiers. What we must know is whether the comments and views of the provincial premiers might mean that changes will be made in the legislation. The Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Gray) said that it would be more a consultation and that we could not anticipate any changes in the legislation. This is a sort of bow to the cliché of participatory democracy. Surely, if the Minister of National Revenue is to be believed, the bow is accompanied with a slap. He says, "We will meet you my dear premier, but nothing in the bill will be changed because of the meeting."

• (1540)

On May 2, the Minister of National Revenue made his momentous announcement about how the government intended to deal with the phenomenon of foreign ownership of the Canadian economy. The minister tabled a document entitled, "Foreign Direct Investment in Canada." I find it curious that the document and bill should have come forward at the same time. The bill, presumably, arose as a result of this document, but really has nothing to do with the warnings which are received if one analyses carefully the document. The document thoroughly confuses the public, and one wonders why legislation dealing with a small aspect of the problem came so late, is so weak and will accomplish really very little. The foreign takeover legislation is well and good, provided it is carefully drafted, contains adequate appeal provisions and has, as an essential component, provision for strong provincial inputs on decisions as to whether a specific takeover is of significant benefit to Canada.

May I say this: the man who works in the pulp mill at Bathurst, New Brunswick, if he is lucky enough to hold the job, is not as interested in the debate on the Canadian life style as he is in his bread and butter. It really does not matter to the man working in that mill in Bathurst wheth-

[Mr. Fairweather.]

er the capital behind the Bathurst mill is based in Montreal or in New York. We should remember this when discussing the whole question of investment; also, provincial assistance, direction and advice is necessary in order that there may be, pursuant to clause 2(2) of this bill, assessment in determining that any acquisition or control of a Canadian business enterprise is or is likely to be of significant benefit to Canada. Unless the provinces take a great part in the evaluation and formation of policy considerations that the minister enunciated both in that clause and in his speech today, the whole matter will fall flat.

It is small wonder that the Minister of National Revenue, I suggest with great respect to him, is anxious to dissociate his name from the report. Presumably, as a loyal member of cabinet, he supports the policy itself, because that is the only way he can continue in cabinet. He spent two years developing the policy in this area and has since seen most of his work shelved, as most hon. members would admit, or nicely wrapped in red and white.

Mr. Gibson: Step by step, merely.

Mr. Fairweather: Step by step? Step by faltering step.

Mr. Gibson: No, step by careful step.

Mr. Fairweather: By two steps? Which step?

Mr. Gibson: No, no.

Mr. Fairweather: What step?

Mr. Lewis: Half step.

Mr. Fairweather: By half step; that is no step.

Mr. Stanfield: By a hop step, or a Russian steppe.

Mr. Fairweather: I hesitate to take the advice of the hon. member, whose usual routine, to say the least, is to take a double step or two-step. I have something to say, if the hon. member can refrain from talking about steps, because this is a half step or, putting it in another way, not really a conclusive step. I hope the *Hansard* reporter is enjoying this, because our interchange is not adding anything constructive to this lamentably inadequate provision. I suppose, as parliamentarians, we should stand in some awe of the government's agility to sidestep the real decisions which ought to have been made as a result of the two-year study.

Mr. Gibson: It is the opposition that does the real sidestepping.

Mr. Fairweather: I hope that the hon. member will be able to make a speech—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather) has the floor and should be permitted to make his speech.

Mr. Fairweather: Mr. Speaker, the tragedy is that the hon. member invited me to buy his lunch today, and here he is taking a half step, or obviously a no step or non-step. Sidestepping may be one of the attributes of this government, but it is a quality I deplore; and, when the government is engaged in what I suspect is pre-election preening, it leaves it open to the charge of being two-faced upon this