

[English]

Mr. Langdon: Mr. Speaker, one of the most important principles which has been respected over the years by Canadian Governments of whatever political stripe has been that the people who are affected by decisions which are absolutely crucial to their lives should have the chance to have input into those decisions and should have a clear communication when decisions have taken place as to what the outcome of those decisions will be. This whole package of amendments which we moved before you this morning attempts to respect that tradition of Canadian history and Canadian law.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, one of the concerns we have had with the existing approach within this country to the review of foreign investment is that it is far too secretive and closed a process. We have seen cases in which very important decisions were being contemplated by FIRA, and in those cases, often on an informal basis, FIRA has turned to the interested parties, to communities, trade unions and potential competitors, and asked those people what they thought about a particular take-over being proposed. They were asked how they felt about this new business which was coming into the country. It has been possible on an informal basis for people to make representations. It was, however, Mr. Speaker, not possible for those same people to have communicated to them the outcome of the decision which was subsequently recommended by FIRA and taken by the Cabinet. For instance, in the case of the Black & Decker workers in Barrie, about whom the House has heard a good deal during these debates, it was not thought somehow fitting that the community of Barrie itself, and the workers who worked in that factory, should have public knowledge of the undertakings which had been accepted by the Black & Decker Manufacturing Co. Limited when it took over the Canadian General Electric subsidiary in Barrie. The result of that was to leave that community in a situation where, when the possibility arose of Black & Decker shutting that subsidiary down, the community itself, the workers themselves, did not know what the undertakings were by Black & Decker despite the fact that those undertakings were going to critically and crucially shape the lives of that community and those workers.

We see at this stage in fact, as the month of April draws to a close, that the 600 workers in that plant in Barrie have lost their jobs. They have lost their jobs in part because they simply did not know what the undertakings were that had been accepted by Black & Decker in taking over that plant. They thought that the undertakings were that the plant would continue to be open so long as the plant was profitable. So they made a commitment to try to keep the plant as profitable as possible. Productivity increased significantly as a result of that commitment. The community felt that that plant had made a long-term commitment to the community of Barrie, but they had no way of knowing specifically and exactly the basis on which that plant would stay in that community. So when it came down to the crunch and the plant announced its closure, the workers who were faced with that decision turned to the Government and said: "Our understanding of the undertaking

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established by the company was that so long as the firm remains viable, the plant would remain open. What's going on?" The Government had to communicate back to those workers, and we have quotations from the Minister to this effect: "As we look into it, we have found that the undertakings in fact were different from what you thought. The undertakings were not as clear cut as you had been led to believe". As a consequence, the Member of Parliament who happens to be a Conservative from Barrie was not able to stand up and fight with sufficient force to save those jobs despite the fact that he recognized, and the Minister recognized, that this case showed up gaps and problems in the procedure of FIRA.

What we say, Mr. Speaker, is that now is the time to see to it that these gaps and problems do not emerge in the case of the new Bill. It is very simple to make sure of that. It does not require a commitment to social democratic ideology. We don't even have to endorse liberalism. All the Hon. Members of this House have to do is endorse a commitment to openness in the decision-making process. I think it is a principle we have accepted as a House of Commons. It is a principle which makes perfect common sense. It is a principle which has associated with it absolutely no problems for the Government with respect to this Bill.

I will be frank with you, Mr. Speaker, and say that some of the amendments we move, I quite concede, are attempts to frustrate what the Government would like to do with Investment Canada as a Bill, because we find that there are parts of the Bill with which we disagree very strongly. However, this set of amendments is not designed to offer frustration. It is not designed to be provocative. Instead, Mr. Speaker, it is an attempt to fill a gap which Hon. Members of the Government themselves will come to recognize if the gap is not corrected now.

I can see what will happen in the years ahead, Mr. Speaker, if these amendments are not accepted. Hon. Members from different constituencies will stand in this House of Commons and say to their own Minister: "A decision has been taken to permit the take-over of this particular factory in my constituency. What undertakings have been established to protect my community?" The Minister will get up, as he has in recent weeks, and say: "We regret that the Act does not permit us to communicate to you as Members of Parliament, to your communities or the workers in those plants, what this company has committed itself to in this take-over". So it is absolutely crucial—not for us because, frankly, our Party will continue to fight on these issues and make political gains based on these issues—for Government members to see the logic of what is a non-provocative argument, a reasonable, rational and constructive suggestion that we open up the decision-making process and make it possible for all those small communities and workers who face problems with the future to have some sense of reassurance because they have some sense of what is actually being done on their behalf by the Government of this country.