repeating myself for the fourth time for the benefit of the Member for Vaudreuil, I would say that there are two basic aspects to this kind of discussion. First of all, there is the matter of completion between private companies. There is not a single company that is anxious to publicize its industrial, development or investment strategies. Therefore, a government cannot publish information provided by a company on the understanding that its confidentiality will be preserved. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out to the Member for Vaudreuil that Parliament itself passed the Foreign Investment Review Act, and that if the Government were to table such documents, it would be failing to comply with legislation passed by this Parliament. It would therefore be a glaring contradiction within our parliamentary institutions, and I think there is not a single industry or company or citizen who would still trust Parliament if it were to ignore the legal principle of absolute confidentiality, which is the very basis of this institution, and I think this is something that should not be taken lightly. If the element of trust were lost when papers are tabled here in the House, I have the impression that there would no longer be many people or countries that would be anxious to deal with the Parliament of Canada. A second aspect, equally fundamental, is that of competition, as I pointed out earlier.

There are various programs sponsored by Federal departments where a detailed study takes place before a decision is made. The FIRA program is one, and there are others administered by DREE, by the Department of the Secretary of State, and by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Until a decision is made, documents may not be made public. There are two more reasons for this. First of all, as I said earlier, the Act prescribes that all documents shall be kept confidential. Second, and this is perhaps the most important part, the company or corporate citizens submitting an application demand that the confidentiality of their files will be preserved. Similarly, personal income tax returns are treated confidentially by the Department of National Revenue.

● (1740)

The same method is applied to industries, that is, the method applied in the case of a private corporation or, as I said earlier, in the case of a private citizen. It is not a case of preferential treatment, since both private citizens and corporations are treated exactly the same. I would like to repeat something that has already been said here in the House by the Minister of International Trade under the Government of the Right Hon. Joe Clark, and I am referring to Mr. Michael Wilson who was the Minister at the time. He clearly indicated that the confidentiality of documents had to be preserved. I would like to quote the Hon. Member to be sure of his exact words, because I think it is important to recall what was said at that time. On November 22, 1979, to be exact, the Minister of State said that he was surprised, and I quote:

—that the Hon. Member would ask that the Government ignore the specific requirements of an act passed by this Parliament.

He went on to comment, and I quote:

That provision was purposely incorporated in the Foreign Investment Review Act to safeguard the commercial interests of investors who are obliged to submit their investment proposals for review under the act.

When an investor files notice of his intentions, and in any discussions that may occur later, he usually, if not invariably, imparts to the government through the agency a good deal of highly confidential information regarding his plans and intentions relating to the investment he is proposing. Therefore, he has the right to expect that information of that sort will not become known, prematurely at least, to others, notably potential competitors.

I could quote several other passages. I think these quotes are necessary because, as I said earlier, this is the fifth time we are dealing with a formal request for production of papers here in the House. I think that if the Minister were to give way to such pressure or such requests, departments would be unable to properly analyze files while safeguarding the very real interests of a company, the very heart of a company, that is, its balance sheets, investment plans, markets and technology. I think that is elementary, and I hope the Member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert) is listening so that we will not have to deal with such motions again. After all, we would all like to make the time of the House more productive, instead of repeating the same thing over and over again. Of course, I could have read the first four speeches I made on the subject, but I decided against it, out of respect for the House and also because it is useful to discuss other aspects that are perhaps more important to Canadians, instead of always dealing with the same topics arising from motions or requests that, for all practical purposes, always amount to the same thing.

On the other hand, I would like to go back, if the House will allow me, to what was said earlier by the Member for Rimouski-Témiscouata (Mrs. Côté). I know that a great deal was said about FIRA and the Foreign Investment Review Act. Some say it is too hermetic and too confidential, and that the regulations are not sufficiently known. However, only yesterday, someone came to see me at my office in my capacity of Parliamentary Secretary, to tell me that the Act was still too permissive. Clearly, there is more than one way of looking at the matter. I believe the problem is a medium-term one. What I would suggest, along the lines of what was said earlier by the Member for Rimouski-Témiscouata, is to submit certain proposals to parliamentary commissions on industry, trade and commerce. These would concern aspects that should be improved and would be submitted by the people interested in improving them and in establishing the appropriate mechanisms.

That is a very good idea, which would enable us to review past achievements and in the light of our experience of the past few years, to make a truly objective assessment and to take the necessary corrective action. It is a fact that in any organization such as FIRA, there is room for improvement, but I am