

Foreign Investment Review Agency

Liberal Party to be a Party of its word and to implement its election promises. I think that would improve the attitude of Canadians toward politicians in all three Parties.

• (1730)

[Translation]

Mrs. Éva Côté (Rimouski-Témiscouata): Mr. Speaker, the topic we are discussing today has already been the subject of many a debate. It seems this is the fifth time a motion of this kind is being proposed. I must admit that, initially, I would be inclined to agree that perhaps more information should be accessible to Canadians, on a wider variety of subjects—I would almost say on just about everything. I do not think this is feasible. With the previous speakers, I deplore this, but at the same time I understand there are some things that can and others that cannot be said.

When it is said that the information requested cannot be provided because of confidentiality as understood in Section 14 of the Foreign Investment Review Act, and that such information may not be disclosed without the explicit consent of the parties who provided the information to the Government, it seems to me, first of all, that the Government must observe any undertaking it has made. I also think that the confidentiality of transactions that have already been examined and submitted for approval to the Foreign Investment Review Agency, must be preserved, if only to protect the companies themselves, for obvious reasons which include the existence of competitors and the possibility of plagiarism, and so on. This is not to say that in the long run, Section 14 should not be amended in some way to enable Members, and therefore all Canadians, to be better informed. However, as regards relations between private companies who are already being asked to submit very confidential information, to see whether their intended investment in Canada will benefit Canadians when the Agency has made a decision, I feel that any commitments made to these companies must be met, and that if we decide to admit them as entrepreneurs in Canada, we must realize that a commitment has been made not to disclose information they have submitted.

As for certain Crown corporations to which my colleagues referred, I think a clear distinction should be made between the private company which establishes commercial relations and Crown corporations which are subject to certain regulations that could certainly be the subject of discussion or debate. However, I do not want to give the impression that I am particularly well informed as a backbencher. On the other hand, I think that the appropriate time for discussing the matter of being better or more fully informed is certainly not when a motion is being proposed regarding commercial transactions between two private companies which submitted their applications for scrutiny by the Foreign Investment Review Agency. I would have liked to hear a far more extensive debate regarding Crown corporations which operate with funds allocated to them by the Government of Canada.

I am not as sympathetic to the motion before the House, which asks the Government to publish information submitted in good faith to a Government agency that has extensive responsibilities and which, I feel, is acting very responsibly, and towards which the Government was bound not to disclose this information. Where the Member of the New Democratic Party referred to the Foreign Investment Review Agency, saying that during the last election campaign, a commitment was made to amending the regulations in the interest of Canadians, I think it is in the interest of Canadians that not all information should be made public. If we want a company to be interested in getting established in Canada, we should by all means create conditions that are favourable to such a move. If one of those conditions is to respect commitments to these companies that submit documents for consideration, something we have a right to demand, Mr. Speaker, we must not forget that in the final instance, these companies will become new corporate citizens. The Government does not give me the right to demand what the intentions of these companies are in coming to Canada. What we want to know is whether these companies will be good corporate citizens and whether they will operate for the benefit of Canada. I think that is what FIRA is doing. Now, if we feel that the powers vested in FIRA are exaggerated or too extensive, this should be clearly indicated in a motion. It seems to me, however, that in the present case which concerns transactions between Redpath Industries Limited and the other companies mentioned in the motion, these transactions do not warrant a motion of this kind nor an amendment to Section 14. As I said before, I would have preferred to see a debate on areas or companies for which we are responsible and which we ourselves created under an Act of Parliament.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, till further notice, I shall certainly have to speak out against this motion as it is formulated, but I agree that while certain things should be said, they are not. Unfortunately, this motion is not the proper vehicle for changing this state of affairs.

Mr. André Maltais (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce and Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate, because I believe it is the fourth time I have had occasion to speak to a motion by the Member for Vaudeuil (Mr. Herbert) for the production of papers according to certain laws, must remain confidential. Today, production of papers is being requested in connection with the Foreign Investment Review Act, and here again, I think we must be extremely circumspect as to the approach used in dealing with such cases. The fact remains that when a corporate citizen asks a government to examine its case, the company is not particularly anxious to have its file become the subject of public debate, and for a very simple reason. At the risk of