

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 6, 1985

The House met at 11 a.m.

● (1105)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

INVESTMENT CANADA ACT

MEASURE TO ENACT

Hon. Sinclair Stevens (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion) moved that Bill C-15, an Act respecting investment in Canada, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg-Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I rise to participate in third reading of a Bill on which we have spent a lot of time over the past six months. I think it is worth hearkening back to the brave predictions of the Minister in December when he said that we would be through all this in January. It is now close to the middle of June, and we still have one final opportunity to try to convince the Government that it is necessary to reconsider seriously many of the ambitions which it has put forward.

While this particular Investment Canada Bill may not have generated wild surges of public opinion over the last two or three months, I predict that in years ahead it will be a matter of increasing public importance, concern and anxiety, and that the consequences of the actions taken by the Government will be as devastating and as disastrous for many ordinary Canadians as the actions taken in the present Budget. Unfortunately, too many Canadians will have to live with the consequences of this Bill. It is not an academic matter.

The Government has talked a great deal about jobs. It said that its primary ambition was to provide a change in foreign investment practices. I have no quarrel with that basic and very important preoccupation, because that has been our preoccupation as well in debating this Bill. We have been equally concerned about the jobs of Canadians and about the number of jobs which will be lost as a result of the actions taken by the Government through Investment Canada. We are concerned about the number of closed communities and industries which will have their technological advantages stripped. We are concerned about the way in which the capital will be used, not to produce employment, but simply to provide for unfair advantage.

Over the last several months we have seen that this Bill is really a blinkered ideological vision of a kind of continental dependency upon the United States. If anything has been galling about the remarks made by many Conservative speakers, it is their lack of trust and confidence in the country. They have said that we must base our economic renewal upon foreigners and that we must go ahead and depend upon their ability to invest in this country, not upon our own.

It is interesting that they turned down a number of amendments to the Bill which we introduced that would have made Investment Canada truly an agency to encourage Canadian investment. The reason they were turned down was because their primary interest, as we saw in the speech of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in New York several months ago, was to go cap in hand to the corporate leaders of the multinationals and say: "Help us out". It is an awful admission of a new Government that it must rely upon those outside our borders to be the architects of our economic renewal. Somehow there has been this blind, almost voodoo-like belief that if all Conservative Members gather around in a circle and chant to themselves long enough and hard enough, economic growth will happen and somehow a form of mystical osmosis will take place.

Let me put forward, for example, a very critical contradiction which we see in the Bill between one set of economic policies and another. The Government has said clearly that it is interested in freer trade in Canada and that it wants to promote opportunity for Canadians to have a wider, broader market for their goods. I suggest that that is a very reasonable and useful issue to debate and examine, but if that is its concern about relying upon freer trade, then surely to goodness it has to re-examine exactly what it is doing in Investment Canada. What we are seeing here is the erosion of the ability of Canadian-based companies to compete more effectively in a freer international environment. If there is any one strong message which has come through all this debate, it is: Let us give our companies a fighting chance in this new, tough, competitive world. In fact, what this Bill will bring, if enacted, is the erosion, a reduction and elimination of that ability.

● (1110)

I am afraid what we will discover is that if we move on simultaneous fronts to this so-called open-door investment policy, without the ability to determine what the behaviour and performance of Canadian-based subsidiaries will be, we will find ourselves with a handicapped economy in regard to its ability to produce world markets. I would like to be precise in this regard. There is something in the order of 16,500 major enterprises in this country. Some 10,000 of those are foreign