

Foreign Takeovers Review Act

Canadian people during the last general election. We waited in vain until finally we received this poor excuse for a bill which, the hon. member suggests, represents the government taking important action on a question that many people have said in many different ways is at the very heart of Canadian confederation from its start until today.

If I, as a young Canadian student attending his first year at university, was concerned about this matter and if, as someone who has taken some interest in the affairs of his country over a period of time since then, have seen year in and year out with this government and that government in power the continued erosion of the ability of the Canadian people to control their own destiny because governments appeared to be unconcerned, then I suggest that as any member who gives any serious thought to this matter I would recognize that when we have an opportunity to debate this question it is worth spending a little time and a little thought on it before we move to passing the government's proposals.

What is the clause of the bill that we have before us, and what is the amendment that is under consideration? The proposal which has been put forward by one of my colleagues says, in effect, that Canadians should be concerned, if we are to survive as a nation worthy of the name, about something more than simply our economic environment in the narrow sense of that term. Surely no one can quarrel with that idea.

Mr. Pepin: No one does.

Mr. Barnett: In the context of this clause of the bill I would suggest that the amendment is more than appropriate. I have been reading and rereading it rather carefully in the context of the title of the bill. I am reminded of something I said in one of the committees of the House the other day. We were considering the preamble of that bill, and the preamble was a rather high-sounding declaration. As a matter of fact, it was much more verbose in its wording than this one, and perhaps less meaningful.

I think that if one analyses this clause of the bill in relation to the generally accepted practice in legislation, all the bill is, in effect, is a preamble. Apart from anything else, I for one regret that instead of enacting legislation which deals with the meat of the matter we seem to be moving to the point of putting this sort of wordy declaration of purpose in the preamble of a bill like this, rather than putting it into the text of the bill, as if it really lent some substance and weight to the thrust of the legislation.

As I read this clause, one could argue that it is hardly worth trying to amend it, because I do not think it really means very much anyway. But if we are to have this kind of wording in a bill, if we are to continue what in the committee I referred to as a Pickersgillian fad, referring to the fact that it was the so-called new transportation act produced by the former member for Bonavista-Twillin-gate when he was minister of transport that seemed to start the trend of putting a lot of high-sounding words at the beginning of proposed new law, then we might as well make it a reasonably all-embracing statement of purpose.

In that context we must be concerned with much more than the mere matter of the economic environment. We should make it clear that what happens to the economic

[Mr. Barnett.]

environment has a direct and lasting effect on our political and social environment. How can it be otherwise? So if it is expedient to have an act, and if it is expedient to state in rather lengthy terms its purpose, then I suggest, as my colleagues are suggesting, that we should set our horizons beyond the narrow economic context of the impact of this legislation, whatever it may be.

The bill, entitled "Foreign Takeovers Review Act" as well as the clauses set some terms and conditions under which the government will have the authority to make certain reviews. The pros and cons of those proposals can be debated under other report stage amendments when we come to them. But in the context of clause 2 of the bill I suggest that the House cannot do less than indicate that the purpose of the legislation goes beyond a mere economic review of the consequences of foreign ownership and of takeovers in Canada. In certain special pieces of legislation we have recognized that if we are to preserve ourselves as a nation worthy of the name, broader aspects than purely economic ones are involved.

• (2140)

I cannot understand the reluctance of the minister and of his supporters to agree to a rather simple, straightforward proposition that economics alone is not of sufficient concern, is not a sufficiently broad yardstick by which to assess the impact of takeovers. One might almost become biblical about this and remind hon. members of the saying about man not living by bread alone. It seems to me that particular reference is well taken in the context of what is proposed in this clause of the bill.

The whole ambit of subject matter that comes before Parliament from time to time becomes increasingly meaningless and our very existence as a Parliament becomes increasingly meaningless if we are prepared to allow the ever increasing erosion of our economic, social and political fabric by the process that has been going on, certainly at an accelerated rate since I first became a member of this House.

I used to think that the government headed by former prime minister St. Laurent was rather heedless of the consequences of what was happening in our economy. But when I contrast the attitudes that were taken by leading members of that government with those taken by members of the present government, from the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) down, I feel that in that particular period we were led by a government that was prepared staunchly to defend, protect and enhance the rights of Canadians to control their own affairs.

I recall with some nostalgia the kind of statements I used to listen to, made by Right Hon. C. D. Howe, when he talked about the dangers to Canada if we allowed the export of power, and some of the speeches he made when discussing the necessity of ensuring an all-Canadian itinerary for the transport of gas. Even though those of us in this party quarrelled vigorously with him on the method he sought to employ to bring about that objective, nevertheless on the objective itself we had a great deal of common ground.

When I contrast the attitudes that were expressed then by those who were supposed to be the leading defenders of Canada and Canada's rights, and think of the insipid,