

Foreign Investment Review Act

But what I am concerned about today more specifically is that we have a government that is not prepared to answer our questions, that does not have anyone in the House prepared to answer our questions. I notice my friend on the Liberal front bench, the hon. member for Ottawa-Carleton (Mr. Pepin). He is the only one there; the rest are out running for leadership. Perhaps he has given up the ship so soon.

An hon. Member: He's waiting to be asked.

Mr. Knowles: He is doing his duty by being in the House.

Mr. Waddell: I will conclude by saying that unfortunately we have nothing to fear from FIRA. We should have a lot to fear from FIRA, that is, the people who seek to take greater control of the Canadian economy should have something to fear from FIRA and it should be out in the open. We should know why FIRA is making these decisions and the facts behind them, and we should have a minister responsible for FIRA who is not a senator but a real minister who can sit in the House of Commons. The government should have someone here today who can answer the legitimate questions put by the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville and the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood.

• (1530)

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, in particular I should like to engage the attention of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Baker) in his capacity as government House leader. As he knows, we have been more co-operative than he might have anticipated with respect to some of the motions which he has put before us. We are making pretty good progress, and we would like to continue in that vein. But my colleagues and I are quite upset about the situation this afternoon. My friend, the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood (Mr. Rae), pressed pretty strongly for an answer about the terms of reference of this motion. The Minister of State for International Trade (Mr. Wilson) is not here to reply, neither does anyone else seem to be here to give that answer.

We do not want to vote against the motion, and I must admit that I am reluctant to move a motion to adjourn the debate. It is Friday afternoon, and the House does not like recorded votes on Friday afternoon. I wonder if the government House leader, with the co-operation he shows so often, would agree to let this debate be adjourned at this point so that we can get an answer to that question on Monday. We could move to one of the other motions.

To us it is a very important question: is this committee to be empowered to look only at the act, or is it to be empowered to look at foreign investment itself? I do not know how much attention was paid by members to the speech made by the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood, but I thought he made the point extremely well. If I may say so in a very low key, we feel a bit offended, almost insulted, that no one has paid attention to it. The hon. member for Ottawa-Carleton (Mr. Pepin) agreed with the proposition, but we have had no response. At one point this afternoon there was not a single minister in the

House. There are four or five of them here now, but none of them with responsibility for FIRA.

I put it to the President of the Privy Council: I am prepared to move the motion that the debate be adjourned now so that we can go on to voluntarism. I think that might be more satisfactory than having someone try to give us a reply who is not familiar with the field.

Mr. Kempling: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of State for International Trade (Mr. Wilson) had to leave the House after he spoke. He had a minister sitting in for him. He expected to be back here by about 3.15 o'clock. Obviously something has happened that he has not been able to return. But it was his intention to return, and of course it was our intention to bring the question put by the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood (Mr. Rae) to his attention for reply. I apologize that he is not here to answer it. It was not the minister's intention to stay away because he had spoken. He fully intended to come back, but obviously he has been held up somewhere along the line.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, I thank the chief government whip for that statement. I am not making an issue out of the fact that the Minister of State for International Trade had to leave, but I am making an issue out of the fact that there is no answer forthcoming this afternoon to this important question.

We can put up other speakers and use the time until four o'clock, but I think it would make more sense if we simply adjourned this debate and dealt with it on Monday, as I am sure it could be dealt with very quickly.

We had even considered trying to move an amendment to the terms of reference. I was in on the consultations, and I suggested that maybe an interpretation from the government would give us assurance that the committee's discussions could be very wide. But without that assurance, we are reluctant to let this motion be passed this afternoon.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, as I understand the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), he is saying that the committee should be allowed to investigate broadly with respect to the whole point of foreign investment in Canada. That is the intention of the government with respect to the matter. It is not to be limited to the Foreign Investment Review Act. I give the hon. member that assurance with respect to the matter.

As my friend was speaking, I reread some of the words in the motion which are very interesting. Paragraph (1) reads as follows:

—to inquire into and report upon the extent to which the Foreign Investment Review Act has achieved and is achieving its purpose as described by Parliament in section 2 of the act—

I have always looked upon that as rather broad, and I sincerely hope they will accept my assurances with respect to that matter.

Mr. Rae: Since this was in reply to my question, I hope Mr. Speaker will permit me to respond. There is a circularity in the