

Foreign Investment Review Act

and unworkable to have a minister in the Senate whom we cannot question, who is responsible for one of the most important areas of government, namely, FIRA, and who apparently calls the economic tune to the melody of this government. Frankly, if I were sitting on the opposite side of the House, I would be a little concerned about that too.

The other matter that I wish to emphasize—I think this was mentioned in the remarks of the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville when he spoke about the kind of industry that will exist in the 1980s and when he spoke about the food industry—is that, to me, one of the very important industries—and this again was mentioned by my colleague, the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood—is the communications industry and the high technology industry. It causes this party a great deal of concern regarding what will happen in the technological revolution. We are concerned about the high unemployment which will result from the development of some of these industries. So we say now that these industries have to be controlled by Canadians and we must get moving in that area. This again is an area where FIRA must be active. This is where we need more information and where we need the government to respond. We should not just have a House with no one in it who can respond to the legitimate questions that my colleague, the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood, posed today. Instead, we have other ministers who are busy with other things. But we want answers about FIRA.

Earlier on in the year I wrote a letter to Senator de Cotret. As many hon. members know, we get a pile of papers across our desks every day and usually most of that paper, while very interesting, such as addresses by the ministers opposite as they go around the country making those deep and personally written addresses, is not as important as some of the FIRA reports which have come across my desk.

I noted one where a foreign oil company was taking over a small outfit in Orillia, I believe. I wrote to Senator de Cotret about this and I asked him whether he could tell me what are the reasons behind FIRA's decision, what is the information he has on it, because I wanted to know why FIRA took that decision. I received a letter from him yesterday saying he was sorry but he could not answer those questions; he is not allowed to give me that information. I thought that was rather ironic. We just debated, in a really excellent debate last night in the House, the first freedom of information act in the British parliamentary system. I see the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Baker) looking this way. We are all proud of that debate and proud of that act. We are going to improve it in committee, but we are glad there is an act introduced. I notice the President of the Privy Council does not have his rose and his dump truck this afternoon.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): They are in my office.

Mr. Waddell: No doubt they are being recirculated as Christmas presents. The Christmas present we want today is information about FIRA. We want the government to respond to the legitimate questions raised by the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood. My point in touching on freedom of

information is that here we have an act which does not allow the minister to respond. As a matter of fact the minister said to me in his letter that he cannot respond to my questions, he cannot give me the information behind this takeover, he cannot tell me why FIRA agreed to this takeover of a Canadian company by an American company. But I will tell you what he has done. He wrote to the American oil company and asked them if they would allow the information to go out. The American oil company said, "No, do not give that information to the member of Parliament." So there is an example of what we were talking about last night on freedom of information. There is an example of something that our new act will not cover, that within the FIRA act is still not allowed. We still cannot get that information. So not only do we have a body that is not restricting these takeovers, not only do we not have a general policy, as the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood pointed out, we cannot even get information about one case.

I see the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Atkey) in the House. I once called him in a speech, and now I would retract it, an obscure law professor from Ontario who has risen to greater things. He is a member who respects freedom of information, and I give him his dues in that department.

Mrs. Mitchell: He does not give out all the documents.

Mr. Waddell: That is right, as the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mrs. Mitchell) says, he does not give out all the documents, but once when he made a couple of manuals public he was moving in the right direction of freedom of information. I am sure he would agree with me that it is wrong to have in the FIRA act the refusal to provide any information behind the decisions, because how can you question those decisions?

The hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood was very specific in dealing with that, and I was even more specific with regard to the one case I mentioned. But the hon. member was also general in his criticism of the whole area. I like what he said with reference to the origins, what he speculated were the origins of FIRA. Frankly, I think it goes back to the fight in the Liberal party between one Walter Gordon and one Mitchell Sharp, and Mitchell Sharp won the fight. He won it for ten or 15 years. That goes back to the early 1960s. Finally, our economy was becoming so controlled by foreign interests and the pressure became so strong that the previous Liberal government had to compromise and bring in a token act. That is when they brought in FIRA, but not very seriously.

I think my friend, the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood, was correct when he said FIRA was a poor substitute for a general policy dealing with the foreign control of the economy. I thought he was right, when he was asking about unemployment, about high interest rates, about housing problems, about our problems with the dollar, and so on, and he came back to the fact that we have fundamental problems with our economy because we are a colony. Basically we are an American economic colony. That is going to be the issue of the 1980s, the issue we will fight.