

Investment Canada Act

Mr. Axworthy: I thank the Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) for that endorsement.

Let us raise the other side of the coin, Mr. Speaker, and Members of the House will have lots of time to discuss it. I know this will bring a scowl and a look of scorn to the Minister's face because he does not believe in this. There is an issue of sovereignty involved. There is a question of the protection of Canadian institutions. Any Government of Canada that has been elected by the people with the kind of mandate this Government received cannot simply put that on the shelf and refuse to deal with it. There is a fundamental issue of ownership and control, because that does, in part, allow us to have some management over our own future. We cannot simply engage in a series of giveaways in the areas of trade, foreign investment and foreign policy. In three short months in the area of foreign policy, the Government has tied its little wagon to the American bulldozer without a question, a contrary word or even a reservation.

● (1220)

In a most revealing interview this weekend, the Secretary of State for External Affairs said that the Government will simply say "Ready, aye ready" to the American positions on foreign policy. He said that the previous Government became too obsequious at times. Prime Minister Trudeau with his peace initiatives had the nerve to go to talk to other countries, and he even talked to eastern European countries—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Could I ask the Hon. Member to conclude his speech?

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I believe that there is unlimited time for the first three speeches.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is a limit of 40 minutes. The unlimited time is for the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Axworthy: Then I will conclude. I simply raised that point for consideration. I know that many of my colleagues will be more than happy to expand upon this Bill in the days, weeks and months ahead as we debate second reading. I will simply thank the Minister for giving us for the first time some of the bare bones of this new Conservative age. I want to say that those bones will need a very good rattling; otherwise we are in real danger of selling out this country for a mess of potage and getting nothing in return.

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex-Windsor): Mr. Speaker, this is a historic debate of immense importance to the country and to our economic future. It is a historic debate, first because it represents the first real initiative which this Conservative Government has taken. As business people have said, they like the smell from the kitchen, but now the stew—or perhaps I should say the popcorn—is served. The Government now has publicly to defend the direction which we believe prejudice is pushing the Government to take the country toward.

Second, and perhaps even more important, it is a historic debate because this subject, the issue of foreign investment, is something that we in Canada have dealt with for decades. It is a subject that has been agonizing Canadians for well over 100 years, since the first subsidiary established itself in Ontario in 1872. We must remember that history. It is a history that should show us something; a history of a growing presence of foreign investment over the years until the 1930s. During the difficulties of the 1930s when we needed jobs, there was a major outflow of that foreign investment which made our depression worse than it otherwise would have been.

We must also recall the tremendous sense of dynamism, expansion and growth in our Canadian companies as we emerged from World War II. However, there was a huge inflow of American foreign investment which snuffed out those growing Canadian companies that offered us at that stage a chance to grow in our own economy and build on our own resources.

We must also remember that the Foreign Investment Review Agency was not a cheap political trick quickly brought out by a Liberal Government in trouble. It was the result of a long period of careful study and of immensely popular activity and pressure throughout the country to address a concern which Canadians recognized was important, but for the economic well-being of the country.

There has been documentation in this country, starting with the Gordon Commission in the 1950s and moving to the Watkins report in the 1960s and the Gray report in the 1970s, showing the problems which foreign investment can create in this country. It is out of those careful analyses and efforts to understand what was taking place that the decision was made to try to establish a review mechanism along with a number of other legislative initiatives. We are talking about something which has been part of our history and which our history has taught us to pay careful attention to and be seriously concerned about. Frankly, our history has taught us that foreign investment is something that must be handled with care and a sense of control for the sake of our country's future.

I believe it is very important at the start of this debate to define exactly what it is that we are debating. The Minister would have us believe that we are debating the future of employment in this country. That is simply not the case. We are not debating whether this country should have direct foreign investment. Our Party has pressed strongly, for instance, for more Japanese investment in the automobile industry here, and we believed that government action was necessary to push Japanese investors into establishing plants in this country.

It is not a question of wanting to block out direct foreign investment. Nor is it a question of investment promotion. It is quite possible today, without a new Bill or any legislation, for the Minister and his colleagues to promote foreign investment in this country. In fact, our high commissions and embassies throughout the world presently do precisely what the Minister says he wants Investment Canada to do. They talk to potential investors and promote the possibilities of investment in this