

Foreign Takeovers Review Act

• (1550)

But I think the greatest bond of sympathy that I can find between the two groups, a bond of sympathy that does not and cannot exist between the average Canadian entrepreneur or farmer and a civil servant, is that they are not operating with their own money. The ordinary farmer and the middle sized manufacturer is operating with his own money, and right off the bat there is a distinction between him and the civil servant. But there is no distinction between the civil servant at the highest level and the bureaucrat of a large corporation; neither of them is making these decisions for our benefit and neither of them is handling his own money. The vice president of a multinational corporation or his board of directors are not operating with their own funds; they are operating with the funds of the shareholders about whom they could not care less because what they are maximizing is their own expansion, growth, prestige and status, and all that they want to do is to give as little to the people who actually own the company as they possibly can to keep them satisfied. Nor is the civil servant operating with his own money. He is operating with the taxpayers' money. So all of his dreams and visions will not cost him a nickel. There is lots more where that came from.

This kind of bill came out of that kind of environment. It did not come from the cabinet or from the members of the caucus who have a political sensitivity to the problem as it actually is and to the depth, width and breadth of the solutions that are actually needed.

I am sorry to say that I would vote for the bill because it is a small step forward, and something is better than nothing, but I will vote for it on that basis only. But after a long period of gestation, far more than the normal nine months, I would like to say that if this is all that the government can bring forward as a response to the kind of problems and to the depth of the problems that foreign ownership represents for the Canadian people, the government would have been better off not to have brought it forward at all.

Mr. Max Saltsman (Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, it is always a great pleasure to follow the hon. member for Duvernay (Mr. Kierans). Just before I came into the House the usual conversation took place behind the curtains when some government members, in an attempt to find out how long the debate was likely to last, asked me, "How many speakers do you have?" I said that we had three speakers, four if you count Eric Kierans. I am delighted with the position that the hon. member for Duvernay has taken because in some ways he reflects what has happened to a lot of us. I can remember the time when the hon. member for Duvernay was less concerned about the flow of foreign currency, and in some cases took very strong exception to extreme nationalist tendencies. This has also been the case so far as I am concerned on a number of matters.

We are being pressured at the moment to get this bill through the House. The government obviously wants it as some kind of a showpiece. Why they would think it is a showpiece is beyond me, but they seem to feel that it is of some benefit to them to get this measure through. I presume that in their view it is of some benefit to the country to get the bill through. There is some suggestion that the

[Mr. Kierans.]

Finance Committee deal with this bill rapidly and bring it back to the House in time to have it passed by the end of June. I think it would be a terrible mistake to rush this bill through the committee and through the House, since it is of so little value. By getting the bill through we may be doing ourselves a terrible disservice in the sense that we will be undercutting the kind of sentiment which exists in Canada to really do something significant about the matter of foreign ownership.

A number of Liberal party supporters are obviously feeling embarrassed about the position in which they find themselves. I am thinking, for instance, of the hon. member for St. Paul's (Mr. Wahn) and the Liberal members who signed the telegram of the Committee for an Independent Canada. They obviously do not see much value in this bill, yet at the same time they are saying it is better than nothing. Even if it is only a small step forward, they feel the bill should go through. I would like to suggest to you that it is not better than nothing, it is worse than nothing simply because it is an attempt to diffuse this whole issue of foreign ownership in Canada with a bill that will not accomplish anything at all.

If we are going to deal only with the question of takeovers, we must ask ourselves what the urgency is. First of all, there is not a great deal left to take over if we start from that premise, and second, since the takeover aspect represents a relatively small proportion of the increases in foreign ownership year by year, I do not see that the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, which is going to have the responsibility for screening the foreign takeovers, will turn anyone down in view of the criteria which have been established. I doubt whether any takeover of any industry in Canada could not be made to fit inside the boundaries of those criteria. In fact, if this bill were legislation today, there would be very little difference in the rate of takeovers that would occur in Canada.

So what is the urgency in passing this bill? If we take a look at the key sectors, we find that most of them, such as newspapers, television, banks, transportation, uranium, power and pipelines are now controlled. There can be no takeovers in these areas without the government's approval. On occasions, when there was an uproar and sufficient concern in the country, the government has stepped in without legislation. They did this in the case of Home Oil, in the case of uranium, in the case of Denison, and in the case of the Mercantile Bank. There was no legislation for the government to use. Where was their authority? Apparently they must have had some authority, unless they were acting illegally, because they moved in and definitely stopped foreign takeovers.

The truth of the matter is that the government now possesses all the power that is required to prevent takeovers in Canada if they chose to exercise that power, but in most cases they simply do not choose to exercise it. What we are being asked to do is take the government off the hook and establish criteria which are so wide that virtually any takeover can be accommodated within the criteria. Then, the government can say that the government has passed legislation and everybody fits the criteria. This reminds me of their good behaviour pamphlet which they sent around to foreign owners of industry, telling them that they should be good boys. I have heard