

Mr. Axworthy: Certainly ministerial discretion is an honoured tradition on both sides of the House.

Let us look at the practical realities, Mr. Speaker. The Minister said that he does not want to take up the time of the Cabinet. He made the spurious statement that investment review takes 20 per cent of the time of Cabinet. That is absolute nonsense. I can say that because I was a member of Cabinet. Of course, it may have accounted for 20 per cent of the paperwork. The reason for having Cabinet review was to give other Ministers who have industrial or economic concerns the opportunity to raise a point if they felt it necessary. It also gave regional Ministers from across Canada some insurance that they could protect economic development and opportunity in their own regions. That has now been lost, Mr. Speaker. This Minister can simply make a decision totally on his own cognizance without any sober second thought or any reference to his colleagues. That goes against one of the fundamental principles of Canadian parliamentary government. The Cabinet has always been the repository and defender of regional interests. Because of the weakness of our Senate, and I do not have to go through that whole theory—

Mr. Deans: It is full of Liberals.

Mr. Axworthy: Thank God for that small blessing that we have.

Mr. Deans: It is very small.

Mr. Axworthy: The fact of the matter is that the Cabinet of Canada has always been the route through which regions of the country have been able to ensure some protection of their interests. This is an area of major importance to every region of the country. Depending on which new business comes in or is acquired, it could have dramatic negative effects in Nova Scotia, British Columbia or the Prairies. All of a sudden we have eliminated the opportunity for the Ministers representing those regions to provide some sober second thought, some other calculation or assessment.

I think that is a very major weakness in this Bill and I hope the Minister will reconsider it. We can ask former ministers of industry to come to committee and tell him that it did not take that time of Cabinet. The time was available. It was a residual right, but it certainly did not encompass the amount of time which this Minister claims it did. The Minister is bringing in legislation which eliminates the capacity for regional protection and judgment.

The Minister has taken the position that he is going to ensure quick, efficient service through this new agency. Of course, he has eliminated most of the review. He has taken out 90 per cent of the applications. He has also said that there is an absolute 45-day deadline after which anything goes.

Let us go back to the principle which I put forward that I hope the Minister might accept, even though we have not heard him say it. When there is an application by a foreign company or enterprise to acquire a Canadian asset, there must be some capacity on this side of the border to ensure that that

Investment Canada Act

acquisition will protect jobs. Members have been raising in the House the problem with Black and Decker. They have not fulfilled the requirements. What would happen if no requirements were put on them? Oftentimes there is a very important requirement that serious bargaining and negotiations be entered into to ensure that the new acquisition will provide a world product mandate for that Canadian company, protect the jobs and ensure that R and D remains here. There are a number of benefits. What happens if the deadline passes and an agreement has not yet been reached? Why should they agree? What foreign enterprise, knowing that there is an absolute cut-off deadline, is going to bargain in good faith? Why should they? They will simply back away and say—

Mr. Stevens: Because they will get a “no”.

Mr. Axworthy: We have not seen any “noes” yet. The Minister has simply said that it is a wide-open world, that they are not stopping anything. They are reading the speeches of the Minister. There were 1,500 people at a dinner in New York where the Prime Minister was promising open skies and open ground.

Mr. Stevens: What do you think the reviews are for?

Mr. Axworthy: Well, that is what we are asking. The review is there to get benefits for Canadians. The term “significant benefit” has been eliminated. New businesses have been eliminated. The threshold on indirect acquisition has been raised. The message is clear. The Government does not want to provide a review, or bargaining or negotiation. The Government is saying that since there is a constituency out there which kind of likes the idea of a screening agency, it will keep the former structure. It is like one of those old western movie sets. There is a big tall building in the front and nothing at the back. It is pure subterfuge, Mr. Speaker. That is all the Minister is giving us. He is not giving us anything real or substantial that Canadian can count upon to protect their interests. The Minister is simply providing a veritable goose. Anything goes through in 20 seconds.

That is why we feel there are serious problems relating to this legislation with regard to the philosophy, the premise and the understanding of the economic environment and what we must do to establish, protect and enhance a Canadian industrial strategy. That is why we feel this legislation is very faulty and damaging and raises a large number of questions that will have to be examined before the House will be able to form any judgment upon it.

In sheer economic terms, Mr. Speaker, we hope that the Minister and his colleagues will reflect upon this.

Mr. Stevens: We will need better arguments than we have heard from you.

Mr. Axworthy: That is the attitude, Mr. Speaker. They know everything.

Mr. Deans: That isn't really fair either. I don't agree with him all the time, but the arguments aren't all that bad.