

*Foreign Investment Review Act*

parliamentarians come out of these exercises, that is, by seeing the good points and the weak points, by recognizing that there are advantages and disadvantages to foreign ownership in Canada, realizing that divisions are more on degrees and ways and means than on fundamental philosophical differences. Personally, I hope that to the largest possible extent the work of the committee on FIRA will be a constructive one, that it will be a uniting exercise and not a dividing one.

**Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville):** Mr. Speaker, like the hon. member for Ottawa-Carleton (Mr. Pepin), I wish to make only a few short comments. I feel it is very important that some minister of the Crown respond to the questions put by the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood (Mr. Rae). He asked some very important questions about the scope of the committee that will be looking at the question of FIRA and also some of the other questions to be dealt with regarding the purpose of the Foreign Investment Review Act.

The point I want to make is that we, as a Parliament and a government, should not be looking at the Foreign Investment Review Act in isolation. In a debate like this, we should spend a couple of minutes looking at other aspects of Canadian independence and the importance of Canada having control over its destiny, having some leadership and developing its destiny as a country on its own. I want to give one example of that, the whole area of self-sufficiency in agriculture.

Hon. members have heard me speak on this before, but I cannot help repeating some of my concerns as they pertain to the increasing lack of Canadian independence in that area and the lack of self-sufficiency in the production of food. One can mention a number of things, but aside from grain, for almost every other foodstuff in this country we are dependent to a certain extent, sometimes greater and sometimes lesser, on foreign farmers. It is that way because we have not had a government recently that has been determined to ensure that we are independent, that we grow our own food, and that we process it in this country for our people. I maintain if we do not do something about this soon, there will be a real crisis in this country. For example, the Science Council recently stated that even with grain before the year 2000 we will not be able to feed ourselves. That will be the case if the government does not change its policies. I believe that is very important.

A country that is so large, with so many acres of land, so few people and so many resources not being able to feed itself is a real crime. It is a commentary on the lack of foresight, vision and leadership by governments of this country over the past three or four decades.

When we discuss FIRA and the Foreign Investment Review Act, we must remember that through FIRA we will not make this country independent economically. We need many other policies to complement the Foreign Investment Review Act. One has to make sure that in every important sector we start becoming self-sufficient, that we start doing our own thing and processing our own goods and materials.

The other day in the House I referred to a recent study by the Department of Agriculture for the United Nations. It

[Mr. Pepin.]

shows that starting about 1974 Canada's potential to produce more food began to diminish in very real terms. It showed that in the 1960s, for example, over a million hectares of land in the province of Ontario went out of production of food, most of it plowed under or paved over for urban sprawl, housing development, industrial development, freeways—I think of the Niagara Peninsula as one example where you have highways and hydro grid lines going through, taking out of production a good chunk of prime farmland which should have been saved for the use of agriculture. It is not just the highway.

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When one puts a highway through a productive area there are service stations and restaurants built around it, there will be suburbs going up around that highway, industrial concerns and, before one knows it, in the province of Ontario in the sixties over one million hectares of land went out of production and went out of production for good. Once it is paved over, it cannot be rehabilitated, of course. That is a tremendously sad commentary on the lack of leadership in this country. And I know that land use is primarily under the authority of the provinces. But we have seen many, many federal government projects which have been located on prime farm land. I remember the argument over Mirabel a few years ago. I am sure hon. members will recall the farmers who came to this House from around Mirabel, and they demonstrated in front of the Parliament Buildings. They were asking that the Mirabel airport be located a few miles over where the land was not prime agricultural land. Instead of that, we saw the airport located on land which could be used to produce food.

That is but just one example. I think of another near Toronto, at Pickering. We saw the possibility—almost a decision—of locating an airport on good farmland. Thank goodness there was enough protest to prevent that airport going ahead at Pickering, on good agricultural land.

I notice from the same study that in 1976 some 3.6 per cent of the prime agricultural land in Ontario went out of production. I ask: how long can we afford to let that happen in our country? I think we are rapidly approaching the stage, not only in this country but around the world, at which we will have to face the fact that we will be called upon to feed the population of the world. It is the question of the availability of food. If we have to import food into a country as wealthy and abundant as ours, then we are making an immense mistake and we are doing irreparable harm to countries which are much poorer than we are and which have many fewer acres of land and much larger populations. These are countries we should be helping to feed, as well as assisting them to become self-sufficient in the production of food.

I could not let the opportunity of this debate go by without saying these few words, Mr. Speaker. There are other aspects of Canadian economic independence which I think are very important. It is not just a question of food, it is the fact that when we are importing so much we are harming the balance of payments. We are also creating a negative impact on the value of the Canadian dollar as well as taking jobs from Canadi-