

Investment Canada Act

May I mention again a situation that I have mentioned before in this House, and that is that we saw situations in Ontario where companies established before FIRA, before there was any requirement that they do research and development or anything other than simple assembly, have in recent years, as the economic climate has become a little more difficult, simply closed their doors and moved to the southern states of the U.S. where there are no minimum wages, energy costs are lower, and so on. In some cases, they have simply closed their doors, moved out lock, stock and barrel on a weekend, leaving Canadian employees high and dry with no particularly marketable skills, no vacation pay and no financial settlement. Worse than that for some of these employees whom I have talked with, painful though the economic impact was, what hurt even more for someone who had served the company loyally for 25 years was to go in on Monday morning and find the doors closed and feel that no one cared enough for him to say, "Thank you for 25 years of loyal work; I am sorry, we are in difficulties".

The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), in one of his speeches, described as melodrama the comments being made on this side of the House about the risks of unemployment when FIRA is abolished. It is not melodrama. It is a real human situation. I have seen in my own constituency office a proud man in tears because the job he thought was his forever was suddenly gone in one of the circumstances that I have described. This was a man who was educating his children, buying his house and proud of the fact that his wife had not needed to work and could stay home to give their children a good start. Suddenly, 25 years of work was just gone without any recognition. This is not melodrama, this is fact and it has happened to many people in Ontario.

● (1520)

I appeal to the Government again, even if it does not wish to accept the particular amendments in the form in which they have been put here today, to stop and reconsider them before it opens the door wide to these problems which we have experienced before and which can and should be avoided. We can welcome foreign investment, but there is a big difference between foreign investment and foreign ownership. It is not being anti-American to say that an American-owned company will not have the same interest in its Canadian workers and in contributing to the Canadian economy as a Canadian company will. Let us welcome foreign investment, but like every sensible industrialized nation in the world, let us keep some controls over and expectations for performance so that we do not let our ownership and our control of our economy go by default.

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, I rise to debate the amendments which are before us. I would like to support the general intent of the amendments. Over the years that I have been in the House of Commons I have found that a lot of the real decision-making has been placed on the head of the Ministry. In other words, it is up to the Minister and his Department to make many decisions which, in the past, would have been made by the House of Commons itself. Since that is

the general direction which the nation is taking, I think it is important that when we pass legislation we give instructions as to what the Minister and his Department should be doing in terms of their responsibilities to ensure that the legislation is effective.

That is the line which is being pursued in the amendments before us today. We are saying that there are certain duties and responsibilities that the Minister and his Department would have if this legislation were to pass. That is something that we have not done enough of in the past. Members of all three political Parties in the House of Commons have bemoaned the fact that regulations introduced by the Minister's Department after the legislation has passed are quite often more important than the legislation itself.

When the House of Commons passes a piece of legislation, we have some general idea of what the Government wants to do, but do not know specifically what the Government will do until we see the regulations. When the Conservatives were in opposition, I heard members of that Party bemoan that fact. Now that the Liberals are in opposition, they are recognizing the fact that regulations should be subject to more review by the House of Commons before they come into effect. Of course, we have taken that position for many years now.

I would like to point out a number of areas in which this legislation needs to be strengthened. A number of the amendments which have been grouped for debate basically put more control on the Minister and his Department. We insist that in its decision-making the Department reflect certain ideas, which we have included in the amendments. We say that there must be greater public co-ordination and planning of the investment process. We say that there must be a broader based input into the decision-making process in terms of advisory groups to various industrial sectors comprised of businesses, labour communities, academics, et cetera. We have also said that there must be an emphasis on achieving greater Canadianization of the economy, and that there must be a special responsibility to assist foreign-controlled businesses and to advise those businesses with regard to the Canadian labour-management traditions.

I would like to refer particularly to the area of community advice. One of the great problems Members of the House and communities have found is that when there is a foreign takeover of a local firm which is very important to the economy of the area, there is no mechanism for the mayor, council, workers involved, or Members of the House of Commons to have any real input into the decision-making process. There is an application for foreign investment and FIRA makes a decision based on certain criteria which are in front of it. There is no guarantee that the community itself will have any input.

Many examples of this problem have been pointed out in Question Period. A number of times the Hon. Member for Brant (Mr. Blackburn) has spoken in the House about the fact that two or three years after a foreign takeover in his area a plant has closed down and there has been no control over what happens. Earlier today the Hon. Member for Hamilton Moun-