

*Foreign Investment Review Agency*

practically sure that Hon. Members have interesting suggestions to make in this connection and that a parliamentary committee sitting at the time when the estimates are considered and the votes discussed would probably provide an ideal forum to carry out this study and take into account the suggestions made by the Hon. Member for Rimouski-Témiscouata (Mrs. Côté). I know that FIRA has been criticized from all quarters for some time. I think we should go beyond criticism and try to improve existing mechanisms in order to better meet the need of Hon. Members. I know that it is very difficult to trust an organization blindly, whether it be a government, a department, a corporation, for there are cases such as the Iron Ore and the mining companies which the Hon. Member of the New Democratic Party who spoke before me mentioned and to which I will return later. But it remains nevertheless that a file should be kept confidential, otherwise it would never be possible to deal seriously and responsibly with the moral or physical entity that submitted it.

I have just referred to the previous speaker from the New Democratic Party who referred to mining companies. I too wish some corporations would disclose part of their figures, and I even asked the House permission once to examine their five-year projections, in order to ascertain their intentions over a longer period of time, because it must be realized that in communities such as those in Gaspé or on the North Shore problems are created each time a corporation operates in complete secrecy, changing its structure as it sees fit, because everybody is taken by surprise. I feel that some checking is required to remedy such situations. It is incredible how those people feel insecure because no planning was provided for some developments. In as much as certain papers are asked to be tabled in the House, I would like personally to see the scope of the debate extended for the benefit of some companies which will remain unnamed because I think everyone acted in good faith but I think that the legislator should be well informed in order to make responsible decisions. There are companies which would derive some advantage in publishing their investment plans although not in every detail because what is valid for the government is also valid for companies. However, I do not think it would be wise for companies to make public the whole of their financial operations or of their investment projections, but the government needs a minimum of information to act responsibly on behalf of our citizens. And a recession such as the current one leads us to reflect on those matters.

Moreover I would like, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that in another debate on Private Members' Business, we could deal with the whole issue of confidential public papers not only when the Foreign Investment Review Agency is concerned but also in the case of the private sector and some other government levels. I am referring to the federal and provincial governments because especially in the Far North, Northern Quebec or Northern Ontario, the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources is extremely interested in their development and I think that the Department would find it advisable to meet more often with private businesses and state quite

clearly what sort of development is to be expected in those areas.

• (1750)

I am very much amazed at all the work which is being done in certain economic departments here in Ottawa, and in the ten provinces, and individual private corporations, but the time might be ripe in my view for some kind of pooling, which would allow for better planning and much more responsibility to those regions and everyone across the board. This could be the subject of an interesting debate in this House, because this would enable us to describe the work everyone is doing in his own area but which should be considered in the overall context. Certainly madam Speaker would be quite happy to have a very animated debate on the subject. Certainly we would enjoy the Chair's full cooperation to discuss all that.

To come back to the motion of the Hon. Member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert), I would appreciate his stating in writing what he would like to know from this particular company, because the phrasing of his motion is rather general. It reads, and I quote:

That an humble Address be presented to His Excellency praying that he will cause to be laid before this House copies of all agreements, correspondence, notes and other communications relating to the requirement by the Foreign Investment Review Agency that Tate and Lyall Limited reduce its share holdings in Redpath Sugar Limited.

Clearly this is a request of a general nature, but I would like written specifics that would be useful to the Hon. Member. Because such a general request amounts to asking for all the documents, and this is why the Agency has turned down his request for the sake of confidentiality as I explained earlier, or of mere competition. But if the Hon. Member requires specific answers or documents to carry out his work in a more enlightened and relevant way, the department and the Agency would be pleased to make them available to him. I would just like to mention for the benefit of all Hon. Members that, as concerns DREE, for instance, a lot of material must be submitted when a company applies for a grant including public interest information and there is no objection to that. However, and I want to emphasize that often the companies are requesting that no part of these papers be made public. In this case, the company might be willing to cooperate with the Member and provide some information, and this was done in the past by various Departments. However, the Hon. Member has made a general request for the tabling of all the records and it is to this that the Department and the company object.

I would like to point out to the Hon. Member for Vaudreuil, who is listening very carefully, that it is the company which requests confidentiality. The Department looked into that because when such an answer has to be given to a Member who obviously is very interested in his motion, the Government takes the trouble to check with the company involved to make sure the answer given by the Department meets the intentions