

*Canada Corporations Act*

wish to incorporate will not make use of federal charters as they ought to be encouraged to do in the conduct of their business.

**Mr. Max Saltsman (Waterloo):** Mr. Speaker, in rising to support the motion of the hon. member for Regina East (Mr. Burton), may I say that the important aspect of his motion relates to the principle of disclosure. His motion recognizes that there may be companies of such a small size as not to represent any significant economic interest. The minister has the discretion to exclude such companies. Nevertheless, the hon. member's motion suggests that disclosure ought to be accepted as a matter of principle. In our society, people increasingly wish to know what is happening. They want to make their decisions and cannot do so unless they have adequate information at their disposal.

The hon. member who spoke on behalf of the Conservative party had developed great zeal in supporting the Auditor General. That member attacked the government for allegedly trying to silence the Auditor General. He said that we must have disclosure of all government operations to make sure that absolutely nothing the government does is withheld from the public. And that is so. Why should only the government be scrutinized? Why should the private sector be free to do exactly as it pleases? After all, most economic activity in our society still rests with the private sector and not with the government. I suggest that it is incumbent on my hon. friends to show the same zeal for the disclosure of information relating to the private sector as they showed with regard to information relating to the public sector.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Saltsman:** After all, many people in our society are subject to scrutiny. For instance, we know how much teachers are paid, how much civil servants are paid and how much M.P.'s are paid. The salary of Members of Parliament can be a matter of public debate, as it ought to be.

**Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West):** That is because they are paid by the public.

**Mr. Saltsman:** Indeed, why should others be excluded from scrutiny if Members of Parliament are not excluded? It seems that there is a double standard in these matters which is a carry-over from the view that business is entitled to a special niche. It is entitled to secrecy. There was a time when politicians

were entitled to secrecy also; yet politicians make no claim to that secrecy now. They do not say their activities should not be scrutinized. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the private sector also should not be entitled to claim secrecy in this respect. At the moment, a great deal of mystery surrounds the operations of business. I am quite sure that most business operations are quite straightforward and most businesses can probably defend their activities. Yet, so long as the mystery exists, the suspicion will also exist that business is trying to hide something and that there is some benefit to be gained from maintaining the mystery. If there is to be rapport between our business community, our society, and those services that operate outside the business community, I think it is important for us to know how business carries on its affairs.

Not long ago there was a joint committee of the Senate and House of Commons to look into the question of prices. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford) served as the distinguished co-chairman of the committee. One of the committee's first decisions was whether there was to be public disclosure of information brought before it. A number of initial witnesses who appeared before it said, "Yes, we will tell you all sorts of things, but you must sit in camera". The committee decided that there would be no secrecy and that the information it requested would be made public. As a result of this decision something strange happened. Some businesses suffered, and they deserved to suffer because of their practices. But quite a number of businesses gained immeasurably, because the public became aware that they were acting in the public's interest as well as their own. Those firms found that disclosure brought enormous advantages.

It seems to me that those businesses that are worried about disclosure have a reason for being worried, whereas those that are conducting their business in a way that serves the public's interest as well as their own have nothing to fear and a great deal to gain for accepting the general principle of disclosure.

**An hon. Member:** What does Marcel say now?

● (5:20 p.m.)

**Mr. Saltsman:** The question of privacy is often raised. We have to be very careful in dealing with this question. We in this party have taken a very strong stand on personal privacy. We cannot go too far to protect the