

Air Canada

Mr. Roland de Corneille (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not stand up and express my opposition to Bill C-129 in its present unamended form.

There are problems with this Bill from the most basic point of view, which is the question of the Government's responsibilities. We are certainly aware that there are many Crown corporations which outlive their usefulness as Crown corporations. Sometimes the private sector can be more effective and efficient.

Some Crown corporations need to be reviewed and undoubtedly, where there seems to be evidence that they can be run as well or better by private enterprise, there is no need for the Government to be in that particular business. I do not think that such a review should be criticized offhand. When the Government looks at Crown corporations to see whether they deserve to be turned over to the private sector, I think it is to be commended not criticized. However, having said that, the question has more to do with the rights of the Canadian people as such. The Government is supposed to be representing the people of Canada. It is supposed to be looking after our best interests, all of us throughout the entire country. When the Government undertakes in a philosophical way to decide all Crown corporations should be privatized, that is carrying the question from one extreme to the other. It is a most regrettable philosophical approach.

● (1230)

Obviously, there are some things that are much in the public interest. No government has the right to turn over to the private sector, out of its hands, those instruments which are essential to public safety, public welfare. That is what this debate really turns on. The issues of the Post Office, Air Canada and Petro-Canada are issues about which we have fundamental differences of opinion with the Government. We can see that the public interest is endangered by privatizing some of these organizations which we see will be lost to the best interests of the total public. Why do I say that? I say it for the simple reason that it is obvious that the objective of any private organization is to render a profit. The more competitive the issues are, the more important it is to render that profit. The more competitive the forces against you, the more is the temptation to try to cut service and cut safety, those things which are in the best interests of the public and you will do that in order to be more competitive. That is very obvious in the area of the airlines. We have seen what has happened in the United States and in other countries.

It is quite obvious that such corridors as Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and, perhaps, Québec City, are very lucrative. That is true for the Post Office, for Air Canada and for any corporation looking at the Canadian scene. Where we have a concentration of population, we can very well afford to utilize and exploit it for profit and operate on a relatively narrow margin. But when it comes to the wider areas of this vast nation, the Government has a responsibility to the people, to

the public interests, not just at the moment but in case something happens.

We do not privatize the Armed Forces in case there is an emergency. We feel it is important that the country itself govern its own safety, protection and well-being. The same thing should apply to security of supplies of fossil fuels. It is imperative that this country retain enough control of the resources of this country so that in times of crisis or in war, it is not going to be compromised in terms of its lines of supply. The same thing applies, I suggest, to the whole question of the well-being of our people in the more remote areas. When we talk about their well-being, we can give lots of lip-service, as political parties sometimes do, to the concern of making Canada more accessible in the other regions and about regional development. It is nice to give lip service to this but we should also take action.

I suggest that our actions in terms of moving to the privatization of, for example, Air Canada, will inevitably lead to questions being raised by those concerned about efficiency and profit as to whether some of the flights should be reduced because they are not profitable and because they do not carry as many people as in the Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal corridors. These corridors are profitable because they have enough people and the airlines can have full scheduling. But we can see that the private sector might be tempted to cut some of these flights in areas which are not exactly lucrative.

I suggest the Government of Canada has a responsibility to look after the remote parts of Canada where there will be in fact a loss of service, and that is true of the Post Office, Air Canada and even of the railroads. This is a responsibility we have as a nation to those who are trying to live in the more remote parts of this country. They already pay a premium. People who live in the Northwest Territories, in Newfoundland which is remote to some of the heartland of our industry, or northern British Columbia and northern Ontario must be serviced. But it will not be profitable to give these people service. That is why the Government had to encourage the transportation industry in terms of the vast area of our country.

I was absolutely stunned by comments of the Hon. Member for Bonavista—Trinity—Conception (Mr. Johnson) when he was talking about Canadian Pacific. It was, if I may be forgiven, Mr. Speaker, an ignorant statement, an ignorant comparison. We know perfectly well that in fact it was the stimulation of the Government of Canada that made CP Rail a possibility, the giving of lands and property and the Government's encouragement by way of loans. That was not an example of how private enterprise in fact brought about transportation links in this country. It was an example of how the co-operation between Government and private enterprise can work to advance such causes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member for Bonavista—Trinity—Conception.