

Routine Proceedings

Lest it sounds like my good friend the Minister of State for Privatization and I are singing from the same hymn book when we talk about selling shares to Canadians, let it be clear what I am saying.

At the moment all Canadians own Petro-Canada. Let us be clear what he is saying. He wants just a handful of Canadians to own it, as in the case of Air Canada, the Pierre Jeannots, the Claude Taylors of this world. That is what he has in mind. That is who he has in mind when he is talking about Canadians. So he and I are not singing at all from the same book on this one.

There is no economic purpose here. If only one could see some rhyme or reason to this. If the government is going to rush out and pay off a massive debt with the proceeds of this sale, one could begin to understand, even if one did not agree. But there is no rhyme or reason other than that blind obsession to separate themselves from everything that a Liberal government had to do with, even the good things, and they were mostly good things, as you know, Sir.

What are we talking about here? Are we talking about market driven decisions or public interest decisions? I believe the time has come for us to assess the future of Crown corporations such as Petro-Canada in terms of whether it serves the public interest. On that issue there can be no doubt. The public of Canada spoke loud and clear back in 1979 on that and many times since in polls. But in 1979, they gave the boot to an administration led by the gentleman from Yellowhead because it was about to tamper with an instrument called PetroCan.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Simmons: Why, Mr. Speaker? The answer can be found in the Air Canada transaction. Who made the money off Air Canada? I will tell you who. The brokers on Bay Street made \$32 million, that is who made the money. This scam today is a broker's dream. It is a boon to the business community, to the Bay Streets of this world.

We need this instrument of national policy in the oil area. After all, let us not forget that oil is still our most important energy commodity and will continue to be so for many years ahead.

We need it down the road for frontier development. What instrument will form that particular role if PetroCan is not there? With the dismantling and selling of PetroCan, the elimination of the incentives in yester-

day's budget, what hope is there for the east coast development, for frontier development generally?

I suppose, in fairness, it should be said that one of the very few good ideas in this announcement is that the minister talks about employee participation. If it does come to privatization, I commend him for having that one good idea hidden away in the centre of what otherwise is a terribly bad idea.

We are losing our control in this area. We are losing our ability to effect energy supply down the road. We are losing our window on the industry. Now he has scorned that, but it does not become a bad thing just because he scorns, you see.

The Minister of Finance, during Question Period today, said: "The company no longer serves a public policy purpose". He is right, and for a very good reason, because this government would not let it serve a public policy purpose. If this government would only put its money where its mouth is when he talks about arm's length relationships, if it would only allow the instruments that we have put in place over the years to work effectively for the purpose for which they were designed, we would have less of this muddling.

• (1540)

If I had time, which I do not, I would talk about the government's lack of any clear policy in terms of privatization generally. It is all over the map in its mad rush to get rid of everything that the Liberal government put in place.

This is not the time for dismantling, not the time at all. This company still has a downstream role in terms of ensuring proper competition but, more to the point, it has an important upstream exploration and development role. It is a role that can only be performed by a company that is in the public domain. It has a function to serve, as I have said, as an agency of the Crown, continuing to encourage frontier petroleum exploration, development in the east coast offshore and in the north. Petro-Canada can still be a stimulus to activity in those areas.

In conclusion, there is a whole area pertaining to the question of foreign ownership. I heard what the minister said about the 25 per cent limitation and we went down that road with Air Canada until we looked at the fine print. We were told by the regulatory agencies of the government that there was nothing they could do. They had no monitoring process and they really had no way of