

The Economy

the schedule C list that could most appropriately be treated in this way.

Mr. Clark: That would be ideally suited for a committee.

Mr. Andre: That is right, Mr. Speaker. It would be an ideal matter for a select committee of this House to look at, and that is one of the reasons why I think an affirmative vote on our motion would be most appropriate. There are a significant number of Crown corporations which operate in the commercial sphere and compete against other privately owned corporations. These corporations are by and large beyond any control or influence either from parliament or from the government.

For example, Air Canada and Canadian National Railways operate in the transportation field. I submit that it is unnecessary that the federal government own these corporations. The government can influence any company in any industry just by its size. Moreover, it has the direct ability to regulate those companies through the Canadian Transport Commission. It almost creates continuous conflict of interest situations.

A number of Crown corporations fit into this category and I submit to the House that the following very simple test should be applied: if they were privately owned today, would there be compelling public reasons to nationalize them? If the answer is in the negative, then they should become candidates for privatization. Some Crown corporations which fall into this category are Petro-Canada, obviously; Eldorado Nuclear Limited, obviously; Northern Transportation Company, obviously; Air Canada; Canadian National Railways; the Canadian Development Corporation and its many subsidiaries, and so on.

I will go further for the benefit of the House and the minister, Mr. Speaker and suggest ways in which that privatization could occur. In some cases it might be appropriate to sell the corporations as whole entities to private purchasers. Where the corporation is less than successful, as is the case with Northern Transportation Company Limited, the more appropriate thing might be to break it up and sell the assets. With annual losses of \$50 million this company is not a great investment. There are other private suppliers of the service available so no one would be deprived of an essential service.

A more interesting procedure for privatization is the method used by the government of Alberta in the mid-1950's. That government decided it was necessary to create a monopoly in the province to gather gas from producing gas fields and effect delivery to border points for sale to other companies so that there would not be a lot of separate gas lines running all over the province. This sounded like a candidate for a Crown corporation, and had the government been Liberal or NDP, that is what would have happened. It was a Social Credit government, however, and it chose instead to create a private corporation and offer shares to people of Alberta above the age of majority; the offer was something like 20 shares at \$10.00 each and more could be subscribed if the first issue was not all taken up.

Mr. Andras: Were there any guarantees?

[Mr. Andre.]

Mr. Andre: No guarantees. The company was Alberta Gas Trunk Line Limited. Instead of a sleepy Crown corporation gathering up a little gas, this is now one of the most dynamic, active, contributing corporations in Canada today. What a tragedy it would have been if the traditional, lack-lustre, reactionary method of creating Crown corporations had been used in that case. This is a corporation that took on the multinationals and won.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but his allotted time has expired.

Mr. Alan G. Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate for a few minutes in debate on this opposition motion which asks members of parliament to establish yet another special committee of this House. The apparent purpose of that committee would be to look into the economic well-being of the country and to see if we can somehow or other arrive at a better form of budgeting and running our government than we seem to have at present.

Before we undertake the establishment of any special committee, Mr. Speaker, I think all of us should look at the numerous standing committees of the House that exist and the mechanics that are available to us for examining estimates that come before those committees, and focus on matters of serious concern in relation to government expenditures in each department or agency. Should we brush all that aside for this new idea of a special committee to try to come to grips with some of the horrendous problems associated with the apportionment of some \$45 billion, which is basically the level of government expenditure we are talking about? I do not know of many committee meetings where the full complement of members present—and I speak of members from this side as well as members of the opposition show their real concern at those committees. Before we even consider establishing another special committee I think we should look at ourselves very closely and ask if we are doing all we can to make the system work. That is my first point, Mr. Speaker.

It is suggested that this special committee could in some way or other make proposals to rationalize the role of government activity in Canadian society by "reducing the share of the national wealth currently consumed by government". As federal members we must realize that close to half the 44 per cent of the gross national product which is devoted to government in this country today is actually spent at provincial and municipal levels. Try as we may, as a federal government there is no way we can control expenditures at the municipal or provincial level. I suppose the argument could be advanced that if we have a special committee then perhaps the ten provinces will also have special committees, thus following our leadership. That is wishful thinking, Mr. Speaker.

Having put that in context I should like now to speak to one of the proposals put forward by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark). He proposes that the special committee should consider the enactment of what has come to be known in the