

Summer Recess

commenced an action attacking the validity of those regulations as being offensive, oppressive and contrary to the principle of natural justice we have come to expect in Canada. I think it is interesting to remember exactly what happened after that action took place, because today, to hear the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet) stand in his place and suggest that this government, vigilant as ever, moved as quickly as possible with respect to its responsibilities regarding price-fixing in Canada, seems to imply that the government did it on its own volition. As demonstrated by the facts, the only reason there was any action on the part of the government was because of the legal action commenced by members of our party to force the government—

Mr. Ouellet: A farce.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: —to open up its files with respect to its implication in this cartel. That is the only reason.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: The government was not going to gag the opposition as it wants to gag the opposition now by getting rid of Parliament. We demonstrated that we were prepared to stand on hard issues in the interests of the consumer of our country—

Mr. Ouellet: What a joke, a big joke.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: —at a time when the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs remained mute and did nothing on behalf of consumers.

Mr. Ouellet: That is what you did when you were minister. You did nothing.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: As a member of the cabinet, he clearly took no action. When the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) admitted on the floor of this House that in 1975 the impact of the cartel on domestic prices became known to the government, that was on admission of culpability, in my view. The Prime Minister has admitted that in 1975 the government learned of the impact on domestic prices. He admitted, as well, and it is shown by the record, that the only time the government started to act was after pressure by us in 1977, when it initiated an investigation.

An hon. Member: How can you lie like that and not blush?

Mr. Hnatyshyn: I can always tell that I am getting through to members of the government side when they resort to unparliamentary language. I think so little of that intervention that I am not even going to pay attention to it, because the fact of the matter is that it is patently absurd, as the hon. member knows.

Mr. Kempling: That is the only time he speaks.

An hon. Member: I am not going to say any more.

● (1640)

Mr. Hnatyshyn: In 1977, the director of combines commenced his investigation, and this took some four years to complete. A report has been given. The Attorney General and Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) considered the report and the recommendations. We now find that six companies, including two Crown corporations, have been charged. The charge is not that they engaged in a cartel for purposes of controlling the price in an export market. These charges are that they conspired, each with the other, for fix prices domestically. In addition, there were the phony bids to which I referred earlier, the gigging up of prices to which I referred earlier, all of which affected the Canadian consumer. Those are the facts. One thing the government cannot avoid is that charges have been laid.

We have a number of concerns with respect to this cartel. Our concern is, of course, with respect to the effect on the Canadian consumer. We are not worried about the attempt the government might make to aid an ailing industry. We are not concerned about protecting Canadian industry against foreign tribunals. We are prepared to take our position on that matter. We are concerned about the government's decision to use a secret bid-rigging cartel making no provision to protect the consumer. The Minister of State for Mines (Mrs. Erola) should pay attention to this because she has some particular responsibility. We are concerned about a situation when in secret, against the law of our country, we have a situation where Crown corporations are now charged with breaking the law of Canada by involving themselves in price-fixing operations affecting the cost of electricity to Ontario consumers, a province from which the Minister of State for Mines comes. She should be particularly concerned about the cost of her electricity bill.

We are also concerned about the actions by the government and its senior officials as well as the political responsibility that must follow those actions. We are concerned because there appears to be now, on the part of the government, a cover-up and some stonewalling. Most important in parliamentary terms, because this is the forum in which we operate, there is a refusal to acknowledge ministerial responsibility.

What is the situation that we have today? Two Crown corporations are charged. One of those Crown corporations, as I have pointed out on different occasions, is Uranium Canada Limited. This company is just a shell. It has no staff. All but one of the directors and officers currently are senior officials from either the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, the Department of Finance or the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce.

If hon. members read the 1980 Annual Report of Uranium Canada Limited, they will find that the present incumbents to positions in that corporation include Mr. Gordon M. MacNabb, president, who is also the president of natural sciences and engineering research council and a former deputy minister for the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources. Then we