

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CROWN CORPORATIONS DISSOLUTION AUTHORIZATION ACT

MEASURE TO ENACT

The House resumed from Tuesday, September 10, consideration of the motion of Mr. de Cotret, that Bill C-60, an Act to authorize procurement of the dissolution of certain Crown corporations and to amend or repeal other Acts in consequence thereof, be read the second time and referred to Committee of the Whole.

Mr. George Baker (Gander-Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying yesterday, the intent of Bill C-60 certainly does not match the intent of the Government in its statements concerning Crown corporations prior to getting elected. I want to conclude simply by saying that we have under discussion in the House today the principle of this Bill. Hopefully, this non-Bill will be dealt with in Committee of the Whole, at third reading stage and disposed of very quickly. I say that because the Hon. Member who introduced the Bill, to use his exact words, said that it was an effort "to rationalize . . . Crown corporations". He also said that "we are going to dissolve at this time" these four Crown corporations. The fact of the matter is that these Crown corporations are not even in existence in reality.

● (1510)

The first Crown corporation with which we are dealing is Canadian National (West Indies) Steamships, Ltd. It has not been in operation for a couple of decades and was used as a shipping service to the West Indies. It was sold to Cuba.

The second Crown corporation of the four, St. Anthony Fisheries Limited, was formed only for a one-year period. Then it was taken over a couple of years ago by another Crown corporation supported by the present Government. It is a Crown corporation that has been spoken of in flowery language by the Progressive Conservative Premier of Newfoundland. As I said before, he said that it was the greatest thing to happen since confederation with Canada. The particular Crown corporation with which we are dealing in this Bill was dissolved. It was finished after a year.

The third Crown corporation with which we are dealing is a strange and important one. It is called the Societa a responsibilita Limitata Immobiliare San Sebastiano which, quite simply, was a Crown corporation formed to buy a residence for the Ambassador to the Vatican. Its one asset was transferred to the Government of Canada.

The fourth Crown corporation contained in this very important Bill before the House of Commons, a Bill enunciating government policy on Crown corporations, is the Crown corporation called Uranium Canada Limited. This corporation passed over all of its stockpile of uranium to Eldorado quite some time ago. It is really not operative.

Crown Corporations

We are debating the principle of this Bill. The principle of the Bill is really a big zero. The principle of the Bill is to dissolve things that are not even in existence.

I would ask Hon. Members to deal with this matter in a very fast manner and to ask the President of the Treasury Board, if he is going to say anything, to be very quick about it so that we can dispose of this Bill and get on to something of greater importance to the Canadian people.

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Parliamentary Secretary's assistance in explaining just what these now insignificant Crown corporation are all about. However, he did not explain to me satisfactorily nor to my colleague, the Hon. Member for Gander-Twillingate (Mr. Baker), why with an unemployment rate of 10.5 per cent with British Columbia, the Atlantic provinces and part of Quebec suffering not continuing recession but real 1930s-like depression, this would be seen to be a priority by the Government.

Since the Government chose to bring the Bill forward, I thought that I would make a few comments with respect to Crown corporations in general because I think it is a subject which is extremely important and one in which there is scope for action by Government. Unfortunately, I am not sure if we will see such action from this particular Government.

There are some 400 or perhaps more Crown corporations under the purview of the Government of Canada. I do not think anyone knows exactly how many exist. The four that are mentioned in this particular Bill are, as the Parliamentary Secretary has said, not particularly important. There are others, however, like Air Canada, VIA Rail and Petro-Canada which are important. The operations of the Government of Canada through such Crown corporations touch almost every aspect of the lives of Canadians.

Crown corporations have been established at various times because the Government of the day was convinced that there was a need for the public to be involved and that this was not an area in which the private sector alone could be counted upon to do those things that were necessary to be done in the public interest. That is something that my Party has always accepted. We think that there is a constructive and positive role for the public sector to play. The fact that there is a substantial public sector in this country is part of our political culture. It is something which we feel is in fact an essential part of Canada. We would not have a country if we did not have a tradition of public involvement. As you know, Mr. Speaker, in the past the people of Canada contributed to the railways, some of which now form part of CN and, since you want me to come to order, CN eventually had a subsidiary called Canadian National (West Indies).

The point I would like to make is that we in Parliament do not have a mechanism for the accountability of Crown corporations. If these four particular Crown corporations had fallen into desuetude as they did several years ago and if there had been a regular review and accountability to Parliament, this matter would have come to our attention, recommendations would have been made and we would have done the appropri-