

Summer Recess

To get back to whether the appropriate companies and persons have been charged or not, first I might point out that two of the firms are Crown corporations the correctness of which surely must be of interest to parliamentarians. The individuals about whom we are concerned were also either senior employees of the Crown or cabinet ministers at the time. For such individuals to be held blameless, as the Minister of Justice has determined they are, they must have had no knowledge of the illegal activities carried out during what has been considered an illegal operation—and so considered by the Minister of Justice, I might say.

The government is asking us to believe that all those against which there was viable evidence have now been charged. Therefore, we assume that he considered that no cabinet member or deputy minister of the day knew anything about the illegality of the cartel, and I am speaking in so far as the effect the cartel had on the prices in Canada only.

If anyone believes the Minister of Justice, he must believe that Senator Austin chaired a meeting at which the director of the combines branch, Mr. Henry, stated that the cartel would be illegal under Canadian law if it affected prices in Canada, and yet the Minister of Justice claims that Senator Austin is innocent. If one believes the Minister of Justice, one must believe that Senator Austin, then deputy minister of energy, mines and resources, pointed out that the cabinet agreed with what was happening but, on the other hand, that he knew nothing about it. If one believes the Minister of Justice, one must believe that the deputy minister of energy, mines and resources never told his minister, the Hon. Donald Macdonald, anything about the questionable practices the cartel was engaging in.

While on the matter of Senator Austin's not even being named as an unindicted co-conspirator, one must consider that as deputy minister of energy, mines and resources Mr. Austin was also president of Uranium Canada, a shell of a company now charged as a result of the Bertrand inquiry. The additional question concerning Senator Austin is a statement to a cartel meeting, held again in the board room of the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, that the cabinet approved the agreement. If the cabinet approved, one would presume it knew about it. One wonders if the one-time secretary to the Prime Minister ever found time to brief the Prime Minister on this important matter.

● (1940)

The Minister of Justice expects us to believe that all cabinet members, including the Prime Minister and all deputy ministers, were in blissful ignorance of these matters. The hon. member for Saskatoon West (Mr. Hnatyshyn) told the Minister of Justice that he was stretching our credulity to the breaking point. I will go somewhat further. The Minister of Justice long since passed the breaking point of my credulity. I simply cannot believe that all these people knew nothing about what was going on.

No more do I believe the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, that model of rectitude who assured the House

that when the Bertrand report was completed it would be made public, and then passed it in secret to the Minister of Justice who refuses its release. It has been a sorry story. The government first helped to organize and coerce Canadian companies into a cartel that shortly turned to illegal practices in Canada; then, when discovered, the government passed a "gag" privy council order to stifle and to make illegal all discussion of the matter.

When one listens to the Minister of Justice at the centre of this debate, one should notice that he answers nearly every question by stating that the Liberal government set up an inquiry that lasted four years and that this should exculpate them from any complicity in the alleged illegal operation. The Minister of Justice never states when the four years were.

There are just three or four dates to remember. The cartel started in 1972. During the period 1973 to 1975, the effects of the cartel were well known but no action was taken. The Prime Minister has admitted himself that he knew of the illegality in 1975, but nothing happened until 1977. The four years the Minister of Justice boasts about were the last four years, from 1977 to 1981. Thus, during the nine-year course of this disgraceful and devious deal, the government took five years of price gouging, bid-rigging and other nefarious practices before they did anything.

Now the government has decided to adjourn Parliament, using closure to do so. This will give them three months away from the critical voices on this side of the House. They will no longer even need to make a pretence of answering questions or accepting responsibility for the Canadian situation.

It is bad enough to close Parliament with the economy in serious difficulty, the mails not operating, rampant inflation and high interest rates devastating businesses and individuals alike, but to do it by using closure is an affront to democracy in this country of ours. It is a sorry day indeed.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Guy Dubois (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, I will start my speech by saying that I am a little surprised at the last remarks of my colleague opposite for whom I have a great deal of respect, the hon. member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon), who for a good many years has been sitting here in this House, except to say that when he says that the use of closure is an insult to democracy, an attack on the members' rights, Mr. Speaker, such remarks do not sound true to my ears. I am a little surprised at such a statement when we are told that while we have high interest rates, high inflation, a postal strike, there are now problems to be solved and closure is being applied as a means of closing a debate.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the debate on the adjournment motion started a week ago, on Friday. Bill C-48 was reintroduced at the report stage, the opposition put an amendment forward and there has been endless talk. One after the other, opposition members have discussed the amendment. I submit they did not