

Oral Questions

● (1430)

[English]

Mr. Anguish: Madam Speaker, I was hoping the Minister would have answered the question.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF CROWN CORPORATIONS

Mr. Doug Anguish (The Battlefords-Meadow Lake): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the President of the Treasury Board. One of the main thrusts of the Auditor General's report concerned Crown corporations and their lack of accountability. Earlier some \$25 million was advanced to CN Marine for the purchase of a new ferry. This money was put in a trust account in the name of the shipbuilding company, and some \$163,000 has been withdrawn from the account for the shipbuilding company. Is this a practice which would be condoned by Treasury Board?

Hon. Herb Gray (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, I have not yet had a chance to study the report in depth. I will be consulting with my colleague, the Minister of Transport, about it. With respect to the Hon. Member's question regarding Crown corporations, as he knows, the Government presented a Bill to the House designed to create a stronger accountability and responsibility framework respecting Crown corporations. Certainly I hope that before too long we will be able to make progress in considering this matter. It is certainly my desire and that of the Government to have an improved and stronger framework of responsibility and accountability with respect to Crown corporations.

DEPARTMENTS' PEAK SPENDING MONTH

Mr. Doug Anguish (The Battlefords-Meadow Lake): Madam Speaker, again my question is directed to the President of the Treasury Board. Something which the Auditor General also pointed out in his report was that the peak spending month for every year in Government was the month of March. In fact some months it doubles other months in which the Government makes expenditures. It is certainly a time when many Government Departments spend off the fat within their Departments or their agencies. Would the Minister take a very serious look at this? Instead of robbing old age pensioners, would he take a look at carving some of the fat from departmental budgets which is very obvious by the peak spending in the month of March?

Hon. Herb Gray (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, I reject completely the premise of the Hon. Member's question with respect to robbing pensioners. There is nothing of the kind in anything we are doing. At the same time I will certainly study the views of the Auditor General with respect to peak spending, as the Hon. Member alleges, in the month of March. I hope when we have examined it that my hon. friend will not rise and complain that any spending we are reducing is for programs he is seeking.

NATIONAL SECURITY

CASE OF CANADIAN PROFESSOR—CLAIM OF IMMUNITY FROM PROSECUTION

Mr. Chris Speyer (Cambridge): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Solicitor General. This morning in the Old Bailey the spy, Hugh Hambleton, was convicted and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. In making representations as to sentence his counsel stipulated that full disclosures of his activity had been made to the RCMP and that he had been granted immunity from prosecution. This was not disputed by the prosecutor, and it was taken into consideration by the trial judge.

In addition, his defence counsel brandished a letter to the court, said that it contained the promise of immunity from prosecution, and said that he had been requested not to file the letter as an exhibit at the trial. Who was the author of that letter? What information did it contain? How does the Minister reconcile any of this with his statement in the House that, "I can assure this House that no deal was made with Hambleton"?

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General of Canada): Madam Speaker, I have no personal knowledge of the existence of such a letter or of its contents.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kaplan: I can assure the Hon. Member that no letter was sent by me or any official on my behalf, offering immunity. I explained to the House exactly what the circumstances were under which the RCMP informed Mr. Hambleton that there would be no prosecution, the basis of confidence that was established, the information that was obtained on the basis of that confidence, and what was done with it. I have verified with the Security Service Officials that they would have been prepared to go back to the Department of Justice and put a case to them again, if at any time subsequently evidence was developed which would have supported the laying of charges against Hambleton in Canada.

I remind the Hon. Member that when evidence is taken from an individual, without any caution being given to him, after he has been informed that no charges will be laid against him, it would be very difficult for that evidence alone to be brought forward in a court, and that the opinion of the experienced investigators of the Security Service was that some independent other evidence would have been required before they could go back to Justice and present a case again.

Mr. Speyer: I say through you, Madam Speaker, to the Minister that the reality is that a parking meter violator or a shoplifter is treated in a far harsher fashion than our spies.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Editor's Note: At 2.35 p.m. the lighting in the Chamber failed.]