

*Summer Recess*

In his speech eight days ago when the government House leader first attempted to send this Parliament home in the midst of the worst scandal to strike the government in 15 years, in the middle of a mail strike and at a time when the highest cost of living of all time was upon us, the government House leader attempted to console us with a litany of the bills which had been passed. To me it was a rather incredible performance, particularly when he stated, as recorded at page 11426 of *Hansard*:

During this session, we have passed more economic or financial bills than ever before in previous sessions—

Later he said:

—there is a lot of major and most important legislation related to financial matters, related to budget, and related to other major subjects, like the Post Office, the Bank Act and others.

Why do I consider these remarks incredible? It is because of the results so far obtained by the government. We have the largest national debt ever, the highest rate of inflation ever, the highest interest rates ever, the largest deficit ever and, worst of all, the highest cost of living ever. There is no plan for resolving our economic problems.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen), when not in seclusion, seems satisfied to let things drift, hoping that a recovery will occur in the United States which might drag us up with it. That is a most peculiar attitude, in that if our government seems to be heading in any direction, it is directly opposite, economically speaking, to that of the United States.

Now the government has produced the final insult to democracy. Beset with all these difficulties, which of themselves demand action, the government has decided to abandon Parliament and to adjourn it by closure, a step never taken before in our history or, as far as I know, in the history of any mature democracy.

I believe it is quite appropriate that the cabinet minister selected to move this vicious closure does so not in his role as Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) but, rather, in his position as Minister of Corporate Affairs. The uranium cartel scandal falls within the responsibilities of that department. This is a minister, hon. members will recall, who promised that the Bertrand report would be made public. He now has the effrontery to claim that by passing it in secret to the secretive Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) he has, by his version of Orwellian double-speak, made it public. I am a salmon fisherman, but I have never seen a fish try as hard to get off a hook as the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs has tried to get off the hook of cabinet and ministerial responsibility in this matter. He has squirmed, he has jumped, he has dodged and run, but all to no avail.

What about the uranium cartel? I have watched carefully during the past weeks the stonewalling, deception and cover-up being practised by the mover of this closure motion as well as by his colleagues, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice. The last two particularly try to answer every question on the subject by saying that their government initiated the Bertrand review. They carefully stay away from dates. This is simply begging the question.

The facts are, first, that in 1971 the government began to consider forming a cartel to control the price of uranium on an international basis. In April 1972 the deputy minister of energy, mines and resources chaired a meeting in the boardroom of the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources when both the deputy minister, now known as Senator Jack Austin, and the former director of the combines branch, opined that the cartel would be illegal according to Canadian law if it affected the price of uranium within Canada. Senator Austin stated that the cabinet agreed with the arrangements. Although Mr. Austin was the president of Uranium Canada, a Crown corporation now charged as a result of Mr. Bertrand's report, Senator Austin has not been charged or even listed as an unindicted co-conspirator.

The price of uranium skyrocketed in the early 1970s, and Ontario Hydro was forced to pass the extra costs on to the purchasers of electricity. I must say that I found the remarks of the Minister of State for Mines (Mrs. Erola) perhaps rather influenced by the district from which she comes. She was proud that Uranium Canada had, subsequent to this, made a lot of money. This may go over well in Sudbury where mining is the chief local industry, and in that particular respect I have often wondered how the Minister of State for Mines would feel if a large excise tax were imposed on nickel as this government has imposed one on natural gas which is found in my province, in Alberta and in Saskatchewan only.

In any event, the extra costs which built up that profit were paid by consumers. Consumers paid extra charges for electricity. This, of course, also rendered the cartel illegal in terms of Canadian law, and anyone connected with its management and operation, if possessing knowledge at all, would appear to be in a very serious legal position. The question then arises: was the cabinet aware of this? Was the then minister of energy, mines and resources aware? Was Senator Austin aware?

The hon. member for Lincoln (Mr. Mackasey), a former minister, spoke with his usual eloquence an hour or so ago, but I am sorry he did not see that as a good time to clear up one matter which is bothering all of us, and that is just when the cabinet did find out that the effects of the cartel were in fact raising the cost to consumers in Canada and therefore indulging in an illegal practice.

I will get back to the question of just who knew about this and who did not in a few moments because that really is the crux of the present debate.

In 1975 the effects of the cartel were known. Subsequently a group of Conservatives started an action regarding the matter. Still the government did nothing.

In 1977 the government commissioned Mr. Bertrand to investigate the cartel. At the same time or shortly after, it passed a secret Privy Council order forbidding any disclosures or discussion of the matter in public. That was the famous gag order. In fact, it was seriously questioned as to whether members of Parliament should be allowed to ask questions on the matter.