

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 15, 1993

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

GOVERNOR IN COUNCIL

MEASURE TO ENACT

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley—Hants) moved that Bill C-290, an act respecting access to information on Governor in Council appointments be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee in the Departmental envelope.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be here this morning to speak on Bill C-290, an act respecting access to information on Governor in Council appointments.

• (1110)

As is so often the case, lovely things come in small packages. This is a very small but significant bill I am presenting today. If you cut through the legal language in effect it says that the salaries of all cabinet appointments to bodies of government and quasi-government bodies be public knowledge.

It is an interesting coincidence that almost 10 years ago, on February 19, 1982, the then member of Parliament from Nepean—Carleton, the Hon. Walter Baker, under the rules at that time introduced Bill C-648 respecting the same issue: access to information on governor in council appointments. It summarizes exactly what my bill which is basically just one clause is trying to do.

Ten years ago, Mr. Baker, a very distinguished parliamentarian whose contributions both in opposition and in government some members in this House remember, said in explaining his motion that:

The officers and directors of Crown corporations, boards, commissions and agencies constitute a parallel public service, and the Canadian public has a right to know the salaries and positions these people enjoy. This is especially important when public bodies are established to carry out policies of government, and even more so where the government or a minister is the shareholder. Since there was evidence yesterday before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts that it was government policy which was prohibiting the promulgation of that information, I think it is doubly important that the public be provided with the means for easy access to such information which should be within the public domain.

In the usual sense of that day and basically what happens to most private members' bills these days, the motion was agreed to, the bill was read the first time and ordered to be printed. From my memory and from a search of the records that was about the last we heard of that motion of the hon. Mr. Baker.

It was interesting that in 1982 Mr. Baker was in opposition. It always seems to be the case that opposition members come forward with interesting policies and suggestions which when they get into government they tend to forget.

I was hoping in the present political climate, looking at the polls over the last couple of years, that the present government would be most sympathetic to my motion. The eventuality of an election in the near future may produce changes in government so that whatever the government is after the next election we could finally cut through and provide the public with the openness that they certainly deserve since they pay the bills.

We all know one of the reasons this Chamber exists is the classic historic fight between the commoner and the king over the power of the purse. That is British history and that is why the mother of Parliaments was created. The commoners would meet behind the bulrushes on the meadows and the commons plotting whether they would send more cattle, more men, more wenchies to fight the king's war. The commoners were not the commoners as voters are today; they were the lords and dukes who sometimes got tired of sending their men, their cattle, and their support to fight different wars.