

*Crown Corporations*

government, either in a committee or some other way, can give full consideration to it and all the pros and cons.

In certain provinces, members belong to boards of provincial Crown corporations. In some instances it has worked well and in others it has not. I certainly would not like to see partisan representation. In fact, I have always said I want to see non-partisan representation. If we are going to have two members on the board of Canadian National Railways, I see no reason why they could not be from different parties. I do not think a partisan approach has anything to do with this question. In any case, Crown corporations are basically not concerned with partisanship. I see no reason why a member of parliament who would serve on a board would want to hold a partisan point of view.

I ask hon. members to allow this notice of motion to pass today so it can have the kind of study that is necessary, so that we can look at all the pros and cons and decide whether it would be wise for members of parliament to serve on such boards.

**Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** Mr. Speaker, this is the second time I have heard the hon. member for Cochrane (Mr. Stewart) advance this thesis with respect to membership of members of parliament on boards of commission and Crown corporations. He and I had a rather humorous "go" at one another some months ago on the occasion of a Social Credit motion which was remotely related to this subject. I apologize because I was not here when this matter was raised in the form of an amendment to the Senate and House of Commons Act on May 29, although I did read the debate that took place on that occasion.

I commend the hon. member for the spirit in which he has brought forward this motion. It has been brought forward with the intention that boards of commission and Crown corporations, like the cabinet, would in some way be representative of what the hon. member has chosen to call the grass roots' interest. I think that is his idea. The background behind that idea is sound. All of us complain about the remoteness of boards of commission and Crown corporations from the control of those engaged in the legislative process.

The hon. member has asked for alternatives and I intend to suggest some. I say with some regret that I am opposed to the idea of members of parliament, whether from the government side or the opposition side, being on these boards and commissions. I say this for a couple of reasons that I will advance. First, boards of commission and Crown corporations are administrative bodies. Their function is to operate a business which the government of the day has decided can best be operated in that context by a pseudo-public corporate structure, if I may call it that.

We see this in the field of radio; and commissions governing land, for example, such as the National Capital Commission in this area. They are into all types of things such as harbours, wharves and wheat. They are basically operating a business or providing a service to the community which the government, rightly or wrongly, has decided cannot be carried on by the usual departmental process: there is a need in the community that cannot be fulfilled, in the words of the government, by the private

sector. These bodies fulfil a particular need, but they are administrative.

As I see it, and there may be many who disagree, the function of a member of parliament is basically a legislative one. It is to provide the machinery by which administrators will operate the business of boards and commissions. In that narrow sense there can be a conflict between the legislative role of a member of parliament and the administrative role in which he would be placed if he served on a board.

There is no question that the member of parliament is too busy to do this kind of work. I agree with the hon. member when he says we work long hours. We are available, and do work long hours; but we do this basically in a representative and legislative function. To add yet another function to the member of parliament, that of an administrator or operator of a business, would take away from the time, effort and energy that could be devoted to his prime function, the reason he has been sent here, namely, as part of the legislative process.

I agree with the hon. member that there is a way of ensuring that the legislative arm, or a member of a board, would not exercise too much control. That is really no problem. The whole basis of his proposal would fail if members of parliament formed the majority of the members of a board, commission or Crown corporation. My first objection is that it is contrary to the functions of a member of parliament, and second there is another great danger. Perhaps this is even more important. A member of parliament, whether he sits on the opposition side or the government side, becomes part of the machinery, part of the decision-making process of a board or commission. What he then loses—and this is what all members of parliament ought to enjoy—is the ability to be free of conflicts. This is extremely important.

● (1630)

Take a concrete example, one which I am sure the hon. member for Cochrane will understand from his experience in another role. Let us suppose the government of the day saw fit to place a member of parliament from the national capital area on the board of the National Capital Commission. Then let us suppose that, even over his objection, the commission decided to enter into some field of the municipal life of the area such as land use planning, and took a position which was contrary to the wishes of a large number of people in his constituency. In order to represent his constituency properly, he would have to stand in the House of Commons, in committee or in some other place and make an objection to the action of the commission of which he was a member. If he failed to do so, if he decided to stay with the commission and go along with its decision, he would not be properly representing the wishes and needs of his constituency.

We often talk here about conflict of interest in terms of money which is or may be available. Here is another conflict of interest which restricts the freedom of a member of parliament to defend the rights of his constituents, from time to time even against the interests of his own party. There should certainly be no fetters placed on this right when it comes to looking after the interest of