

Crown Corporations

right of knowing what is going on before we are faced with a *fait accompli*.

I do not suppose in this one hour this afternoon we are going to make any decisions about this matter. I think that the house, by leave—and I know what Beauchesne, citation 202 (6), says about moving motions—might do certain things. I think that the house might allow this resolution to be considered by a new standing committee that we have set up, the crown corporations committee. I see no danger in this, and the matter could be gone into more fully. The dangers that some people think exist in this resolution could be examined, as could some of the advantages.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Coast-Capilano (Mr. Davis), who I understand is here, that:

The standing committee on crown corporations be empowered to consider private members notice of motion No. 17 and report back to the house.

Mr. Speaker: As the hon. member himself has pointed out, there is a requirement for unanimous agreement before the motion can be considered in the house. There is also a procedural flaw in that the hon. member having proposed the original motion cannot propose the amendment. Nevertheless hon. members may want to indicate their views in connection with the amendment now moved by the hon. member.

Hon. Gordon Churchill (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I had not intended to enter this debate until I first considered who was moving the motion. However, after listening to the very interesting comments of the hon. member who has just spoken I think I should say a word or two. At the outset I cannot think of any reason why this matter could not be referred to the committee that the hon. member suggests. There would be greater opportunity for considering his proposal in committee because our time is limited here.

I throw out just a few ideas with regard to the motion. It is attractive at first glance. How practical it is is something that would have to be considered.

I think the hon. member is quite right when he says that the main function of parliament, which still subsists, is to determine how much money shall be exacted from the people by taxation and then to scrutinize very carefully how that money shall be spent. Although that purpose still lies with parliament and although we try to exercise it, we all know it is very difficult to maintain that

[Mr. Walker.]

supervision over taxation and expenditure that we should like. On the other hand, I do not think it is quite right to suggest that many of these crown corporations are not subjected to rather careful scrutiny. I had a fair bit of experience with this in days gone by, particularly with Atomic Energy of Canada Limited for which I reported to this house for about six years.

• (6:30 p.m.)

Atomic Energy of Canada Limited is not a profit-making organization; it is one of those in which we invest money year after year. We have done so regularly with general approval, as well as with great success judging by the results that have been achieved. My point in this connection is that as the minister responsible for this corporation I was obliged, after meeting with the directors and hearing their views as to their requirements, to put their suggestions before treasury board and before the cabinet. So an examination of the expenditure contemplated by the organization was carried out by channels competent to consider the matter.

Treasury board, which is a committee of ministers of the crown assisted by officials, is very well qualified to examine requests for money. From my own experience, sometimes treasury board can be ruthless in rejecting even the soundest arguments for utilizing tax money in certain directions. My recollection is that a careful examination of requirements was made by treasury board and by cabinet before the government consented to present to parliament a request for an allocation of money to be made to Atomic Energy of Canada.

I believe this applies to all the crown corporations the hon. member mentioned. So although members of parliament are not sitting on the boards of these corporations numerous members of parliament, particularly those in the cabinet, are directly concerned. They, treasury board and finally the whole cabinet have a chance to look carefully at the proposed expenditure. In this way there is a review of expenditure.

On the other hand, it is true that parliament as a whole does not have the same opportunity for detailed study as is given to members of the cabinet. Whether or not the hon. member's suggestion would result in an improvement, I do not know. If members of parliament were appointed to these boards it would certainly provide opportunities for them to become more or less expert in the operation of some of these organizations. This