

pleasure and without accountability. That is the unfortunate fact of today.

We find ourselves in a situation where, if Crown corporations are to be at public cost, they must also become a public responsibility. It is important that a mechanism to create that responsibility be put in place. Bill C-24 does not lend itself to the provision of Parliament's accountability. It does lend itself to the convenience of Cabinet so that Cabinet may continue to appoint at pleasure and ask for accountability only if Cabinet wants accountability. The Bill does not allow for an individual committee of Parliament to call a Crown corporation into question if it recognizes that some concern does exist.

I ask rhetorically why the Agriculture Committee should not, in some future year, call into question the Crown corporation of Canagrex? Why would it not be appropriate to bring before that committee the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, for example, to ask whether or not the marketing of beef products was being carried out in a way which was in the best interests of the producers? Why could the committee not, on behalf of the citizens of Canada, put the management of that corporation on the spot and ask it to account to the public as to whether or not the agency was serving the public and serving it well?

I ask rhetorically why groups like the Alberta, Ontario or Quebec swine breeders' associations, groups that do an excellent job of marketing their pork products privately in the Third World, should not be able to ask Canagrex whether or not it is interfering with their own private initiatives and whether or not that interference is counter-productive to the over-all well-being of the nation? If the corporation cannot answer satisfactorily to such a committee, the committee ought to have the power to redress the corporation and to bring it into line with the proper management and marketing techniques which are in the best interests of all Canadians, whether it be through that agency or through the private sector.

In 1976 the Auditor General first warned Canadians that Crown corporations were starting to grow up around the Government. At that time he said that weak and ineffective control of public spending through Crown corporations is a dangerous threat to the Canadian people. By 1983, Sir, only six years later, the Auditor General said in his report of 1983:

Parliament is becoming further isolated from an increasing portion of government activities. The growing practice of using Crown-owned corporations to conduct a widening range of government activities has so strained the capability of the existing accountability framework that Parliament may not be able to exercise its fundamental responsibility for overseeing receipts and expenditures of public funds.

That is the most damning comment about a government that could be made by any public servant. He said in effect that we are losing control of the purse strings of the country.

Today, as compared with the figures in 1962, Crown corporations have increased some 250 per cent. In 1962 there were only 28 Crown corporations. I submit that to me, that would seem like a lot even today. Yet the facts are that the Government is involved in more than 300 Crown corporations. I can attest to that because of an answer I received to a question

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that I put on the Order Paper. The fact is that the Government is either wholly or partially involved in some 400 agencies, many of which are Crown corporations. The truth of the matter is that that whole sub-layer about which the Auditor General is concerned is hidden from the public and from Parliament with no control or checks, yet it sucks upon the people's money.

The taxpayers must pay for an enormous debt load which is created by people who are appointed at the pleasure of the Government. Usually these people are not appointed for reasons of skills or abilities but because they come from the kingdom of Gritdom. They serve on all of these boards because they are Grits. Crown corporations, like the Senate, are used as a place of reward. All we ask, Mr. Speaker, in light of democratic principles, is that accountability come into place.

Today, Mr. Speaker, Crown corporations are hiring some 265,000 persons. That figure, Sir, is greater than the number of working persons in Edmonton and Calgary combined. I say that to point out the growth of Crown corporations. Certainly people in western Canada will know that if within the Crown corporations of the nation are employed as many people as are employed in those two major cities of Alberta, then obviously Crown corporations have grown far beyond the capacity of the nation to endure that unfortunate fact without question.

• (1540)

I see, Mr. Speaker, you are signalling that my time is up. I have only commented on two pages of notes out of the ten pages which I had prepared. Obviously, it is only the time which has gone, not the issue. Therefore, I will sit down out of respect for that regulation.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity to say a few words about the whole question of Crown corporations and accountability. The accountability of Crown corporations to Parliament, and through Parliament to the public, is a question that concerns everyone. Indeed, it was a matter which was regarded with some urgency and importance by the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure. That Committee made recommendations with regard to the accountability of Crown corporations which I would recommend to Members who are interested in this issue.

The whole question of accountability of Crown corporations has long been an interest of mine, coming as I do from a company town—the company being the Canadian National Railways. I have had experience with Crown corporations for a long time and I am as interested as anyone else in making Crown corporations accountable. I would like to see them made accountable so that they could work better for Canadians and for the well-being of the country.

I am not against Crown corporations in principle or against public ownership in principle, as are many of my Conservative colleagues to the right. That is often the hidden motivation for some of the criticisms they make.