

Export Development Act

something for these people who are very, very important Canadians.

Mr. Lee Clark (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct my remarks today to the concerns of the public as I have witnessed them during the last few months, particularly during the period of time in which I was a candidate in the byelection in Brandon-Souris in the spring of this year. One of the things I found at that time, Mr. Speaker, that distressed me, and the explanation for which can be found to some degree in this Bill, was a growing amount of distrust of Government among the public at large, a considerable amount of distrust of the civil servants who work for the Government, and there is particularly a demand by the public for more accountability by Government and its employees, accountability, Mr. Speaker, first of all to this Parliament and, second, and perhaps even more important, to the people of Canada as a whole.

It seems to me, from my studies of Canadian history—and I have devoted a considerable part of my life to that—that there has never been a time in Canadian history where there has been such distrust of Government and, quite frankly, so much concern about the importance and relevance of Parliament. I think one of the reasons for this is the growth of Government, first of all, the growth of the Civil Service, second, and, perhaps more germane to this discussion, the growth of Crown corporations, which seem to a very large degree to be operating in a world of their own, independent of scrutiny from this Parliament. It seems to me that there is an inherent danger in this particular piece of legislation. This particular Crown corporation will have the opportunity to become even less responsive to the will of this Parliament and hence to the will of the people of Canada than certainly we would wish, and certainly less than the people of Canada would wish.

It is not, Mr. Speaker, that the people of Canada have any particular distaste for any one form of Government. They recognize the role of many forms of administration, but they hold very much as a bottom line the necessity that the arm of Government, in this case, a Crown corporation, must be accountable in every way feasible to the Parliament of this land and hence to the people of this land. Unfortunately, as I understand this Bill, the EDC is going to be permitted to a very large degree to act independently of the will of Parliament. There is only the most minor accountability required of it in the sense that it must present an annual report to this body. In addition, as I understand the legislation, there is a further provision within the Bill which means that the Cabinet, by Order in Council, can act, if it wishes, even independent of the will of the EDC. It seems to me that in doing so it separates the executive arm of Government even further from the legislative arm and the will of the public.

One of the results of this, Mr. Speaker, is that we have discovered, just on the eve of this Parliament reconvening, that a large percentage of the public, far too great a percentage in my estimation, some 67 per cent if I remember correctly, have come to the conclusion that the actions of this Parliament are not of particular importance to them. In fact, they have come

to the conclusion that Parliament to a substantial degree is becoming irrelevant. I, and I am sure most other Members of this House, would of course quarrel with that conclusion, but it seems to me that as a result of the manner in which we have drafted our legislation in the past and the manner in which we have administered the country, particularly in the realm of Crown corporations, demonstrates that we ourselves have encouraged the public to reach that conclusion. By comparison, in 1962 there were only 28 Crown corporations operating in Canada, and at that time they were largely, and I think reasonably clearly, accountable to Parliament. Today we have more than 300 Crown corporations, and I daresay that there are many Hon. Members who are not exactly certain as to the number of Crown corporations.

● (1600)

Mr. McDermid: Not even the Government knows.

Mr. Clark (Brandon-Souris): The amount of money being controlled by those Crown corporations has grown astronomically, and almost in direct proportion there has developed a gap between those Crown corporations and Parliament as a whole, and hence, the public. As a result, many people have come to the conclusion that the real authority within the land rests in a place other than here.

It seems to me that all Members of the House, those on the other side as well as those on this side, have a very pressing need to correct that concern. One of the ways we can do that is by ensuring that all Crown corporations be made more directly accountable to this Parliament and by amending this piece of legislation to ensure that the Export Development Corporation reports more directly and immediately to the House than is proposed. In particular, the provision by which the Cabinet, the executive arm, by Order in Council, could make loans which might well be contrary to the criteria established by the Export Development Corporation, permitting it to operate in an independent and perhaps irresponsible manner, must be amended.

If the public is to recover the faith it once had in Parliament and in the parliamentary process, then we as Parliamentarians and all those who are part of the governmental process must seize upon every opportunity which is given to us to seem to be answerable to the public. We must also be able to provide the public with as much information as it seeks so that people are able to evaluate the doings of Parliament and, of course, the actions of Crown corporations as well. It seems to me that the Government has strayed from that objective. Instead of making Crown corporations more accountable to the public, it has done the opposite. The end result is that we have had more Crown corporations than the public desires. We have had more Crown corporations operating independently of the public and of Parliament than the public desires. Therefore, the impression has been created that there is an arm of Government which is operating independent of the will of the public. In doing so, the Government has very much contributed to its own demise as far as the public perception is concerned. We have an opportunity to rectify that at this point. It seems to me