

Energy, Mines and Resources

Therefore, we find yet again that Parliament is making commitments in its name, in the name of the people of Canada, without being directly involved, without having the opportunity to fully debate and without having the opportunity to amend and make specific proposals. Surely, as if this were not bad enough, we should also ask ourselves, was the minister correct? Was he factual? I will choose my words carefully. Did he factually inform the House when he said in his remarks earlier that these corporations would be limited to the energy field? If one asks the minister that question, he will refer you to the bill, to Clause (1), paragraphs (c), (d), (e) and (f). He read them out. All of those deal with the energy field. His argument is that these new Crown corporations will be expected to confine themselves strictly to the energy field. Is it true? Mr. Speaker, it is not true. The Crown corporations, because they will be incorporated under the Canada Business Corporations Act, will have the powers of a natural person. That means that they will have the ability to go into any field they like such as private energy or transportation. They can buy an airplane company, they can set up a radio station, they can purchase a newspaper. If they want to control supply, they can go and buy a pulp and paper mill. All of this is allowed under the Canada Business Corporations Act. The sections in here which list the various broad-ranging powers in the energy field that can be exercised by these companies in no way limit the scope of these companies to get into new areas.

• (2110)

What we are doing, Mr. Speaker, is giving carte blanche for public funds to be spent to purchase and create new Crown corporations of an unlimited number, not just in the energy field but corporations which will have the authority to move into any field in or out of Canada when they so desire. That is what this bill will do. I would suggest, with due respect, that when the minister says to the House that the bill would be restricted to the energy field, he should consult with his legal advisers, because that simply is not the case. Is that the sort of legislation, Mr. Speaker, which the House of Commons should be approving? I think not.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Beatty: Surely if we are discharging our responsibility, we have the job on behalf of our constituents, to demand that the minister indicate what Crown corporations he wants to set up, what will be their responsibilities, what will be the cost to the taxpayers, what will be the limitations on their powers. We do not know. It is carte blanche which Parliament is being asked to give tonight.

What if the new Crown corporations that are being created want to keep the spirit of what the minister said? What if someone refers to *Hansard* and finds, even though we know what the Canada Business Corporations Act said, the minister said that these corporations will be restricted to the energy field, the incredibly broad-ranging powers within the energy field. Is he going to do that? What then can a Crown corporation do if it wants to stick to the energy field but it wants to be

involved in other areas as well? What can it do? It can incorporate a subsidiary. Under the Canada Business Corporations Act, this Crown corporation can go out and create a subsidiary in any field whatsoever. The minister says, here we have control. The President of the Treasury Board was so impressed with this last evening.

The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources cannot create a new Crown corporation without the consent of the governor in council. Is the governor in council's consent required when these new Crown corporations incorporate subsidiaries? It is not. The bill is mute on that. Under the Canada Business Corporations Act, any number of new subsidiaries can be set up. Is Parliament to be consulted? Will the order, which did not exist be laid before Parliament so that we can have a debate in Parliament as to whether or not it should be allowed? No, there is no order. It cannot be laid before Parliament. You cannot have even the very limited powers of a negative resolution which has been proposed by the minister.

These subsidiary corporations can be involved in any field, they can incur debts in the name of Her Majesty, they can go well beyond any scope that was considered by Parliament. Parliament will not have the power to intervene.

An hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. Beatty: Parliament cannot intervene because it will not come up before Parliament. It will not come back to the President of the Treasury Board to be considered. He will not have the opportunity in the case of the subsidiary, to be one of the three other ministers of the Crown who join with the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources in signing an order in council—because there will be no order in council.

How can Parliament be expected to approve a measure of this nature? Is that adequate? Are we discharging our responsibility? Is the President of the Treasury Board, after two years of being charged with the responsibility for drawing up comprehensive legislation, to bring some element of accountability to Crown corporations, doing his job?

An hon. Member: No! He ought to be ashamed of himself.

Mr. Beatty: When the President of the Treasury Board was a private member, what was his responsibility to Parliament? He was the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. And what committee of Parliament has been more active than the Public Accounts committee in putting reports before Parliament and saying to Members of Parliament that action must be taken to bring in a regime of accountability for Crown corporations? That was when he was a private member; that was when he was allowed to have ideas of his own. Now he is a member of the cabinet, he is not allowed to express those ideas. He is responsible now for defending whatever the cabinet decides. He is the one to whom the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) gave the responsibility for a regime of accountability by Crown corporations. And this is the regime of accountability, this is the way he believes Parliament should be involved.

An hon. Member: He ought to be ashamed.