serious about making crown corporations accountable and efficient. I am not fooled and I do not think the Canadian public will be fooled either by what I consider at this point to be a band-aid approach to responsible government. It will not stick and I would like to try to explain why.

My friends in the legal profession tell me there is a saying that American lawyers have to the effect that you cannot get good fruit from a poison tree. When you talk about crown corporations, "poison tree" becomes a poison orchard. The magnitude of the problem with crown corporations is staggering. Today, federal crown corporations employ over a quarter-of-a million people. There are over 450 crown corporations and mixed enterprises. Their asset value, as at March 31, 1984, is around $65 billion, excluding the Post Office Corporation and Canada Lands. The annual flow of funds involved budgetary appropriations of $3 billion; operating expenses flow through, $2.7 billion; a quarter of a billion dollars automatically in capital. These are big numbers. We must realize that the federal crown corporations sector is larger than Argus, Brascan, Canadian Pacific Investments, Cemp and Power Corporation combined. You can see, then, why it is an area that needs to be of some concern.

● (1210)

Crown corporations have become like lotteries: They just keep growing. Admittedly, the government does recognize that the crown corporation sector is out of control and perhaps C-24 goes a little way in the direction of correcting some of the problems, but it falls far short. In my opinion, C-24 does not tackle the two main issues in the crown corporation area—accountability and effective, efficient management.

Let me recount, in brief, the history of the exercise that has culminated in Bill C-24. Senators Pitfield and Kirby were deeply involved in most aspects of this exercise in their previous incarnations. Others of us might be surprised to know that the exercise began 14 years ago, in 1972, with a cabinet direction to the Privy Council Office to study the responsiveness of crown corporations to government policy. It continued through the Estey Commission of inquiry into Air Canada in 1975; the Auditor General's many observations and recommendations relating to crown corporations, beginning with his annual report to Parliament in 1976; the hearings of the Public Accounts Committee on AECL in 1977, on crown corporations generally in 1978 and on Polysar in 1978; the PCO's "blue book" on crown corporations published in 1977; the Lambert Royal Commission report in 1979; Bills C-153 and C-123 tabled in 1982; the Canadair and de Havilland problems and the Public Accounts Committee report on Canadair, and finally Bill C-24.

My point is this: With all of this time spent and all of these studies undertaken, why has the government waited until the dying days of this Parliament to bring forward crown corporations legislation? Why, having waited so long to table legislation, does the government push it through so quickly? Bill C-24 was tabled in the other place on March 15 and it has been pushed through by the government in three months. In my opinion, Bill C-24 in this form is a shining example of that old saying that haste makes waste. I was most interested in comments made by Senator Molson about the Bank Act. Why the haste? I am not sure that any of the senators, at least on this side of the chamber, are really competent at this point to make any comment whatsoever. Even the Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate—

Senator Roblin: I am in the same category on this bill. I do not know anything about it either.

Senator Kelly: We took three years to pass the Petro Canada Act. That was one crown corporation. We took two years to pass the Canagrex Act; that, too, was one corporation. It took a year for the passage of the revised Air Canada Act in 1977, but C-24, which covers all crown corporations, this lengthy, technically complex bill, is forced through by the government in three months. I ask again, why the haste?

The government was so eager to push this legislation through that it said yes to amendments offered by my party in the other place. In fact, it said yes to more than 50 per cent of over 100 amendments that were being offered. Here is the result. These are amendments that emerged through discussion and argument but the mood of the forum in which these arguments were taking place was "Look, just tell us what you would like and we will put it in." Process, clearly, was the objective; "Let's get our bill through. Whatever you want in it, just tell us and we will put it in." No fuss, no arguments.

Honourable senators, at this point Bill C-24 is just a collection of several documents. It is a hodge-podge of words on paper. The government gobbled up our suggestions without any real interest in policy or consistency; just process. There are many thoughtful amendments. In fact, I have to be partisan and suggest that most of the amendments that were accepted were from our party, and they are probably the only credible parts of the bill.

My comments are not idle reflections. They are the result of over four months of careful scrutiny of federal crown corporations. I was privileged to serve as co-chairman of the Conservative Task Force on Crown Corporations. I was given this privilege because at least my personal experience with this sector has provided me with insight and a better understanding of the woes afflicting public enterprise. Again, I do not know how many of my colleagues on this side have even handled this document, let alone read it.

I believe that the process by which Bill C-24 has been prepared is irrevocably sullied. That alone should cause us to look with suspicion on this bill. I am sure that my honourable colleagues are familiar with some of the nonsense that the government resorted to in order to get this bill to this chamber today. The government applied pressure on crown corporations, particularly cultural corporations, to keep quiet and not to appear before a parliamentary committee. They were told to "take a dive on Bill C-24". That is a matter of record in the committee of the other place.

What have we come to in this country if the government uses its power to stifle and suppress legitimate concerns about, and opposition to, some of its own initiatives? How, as par-