

The Address—Mr. Francis

reform of the rules with regard to the number of private members' bills to be submitted in one session. If the hon. member for Cochrane had this in mind, it is worthy. It draws attention to this situation. I know the proposal to have members of Parliament on the boards of directors of Crown corporations will be resisted, not the least of which resistance will come from the corporations concerned. That can be taken for granted. The force of inertia will be one of the things. It will also be resisted by those who do not think any new ideas have a possibility of working.

It has been said that the role of a private member is not clear if he is placed on a board of directors. He would be either snowed under by the establishment or a thorn in the flesh of somebody. The possibility that it would be useful or constructive has not come through to them. In the province of Ontario this device has been used effectively. I have spoken to a number of members from both sides of the House and to a number of members who serve on the boards of such corporations. It is my personal opinion that it is a useful device and creates a bridge between the elected representatives of Parliament and the Crown corporations. It manages to achieve a degree of autonomy that is not inconsistent with the electoral process.

Some members say the relationship of the private member to the government would be anomalous. They say the member would be in an impossible position, his duties would be too great, and so on. Those who say this ignore the experience in the province of Ontario which should be carefully examined. Hon. members will possibly have 38 opportunities to examine whether members should be on the boards of directors of 38 Crown corporations which have been enumerated. I hope hon. members will ask what devices are available to Parliament to bring in a greater degree of accountability of the Crown corporation sector to this place.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. It being six o'clock, I do now leave the Chair. The sitting will resume at eight o'clock p.m.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

Mr. Francis: Mr. Speaker, before the House rose at six o'clock I was talking about the problem of public accountability of that sector of the public service generally called Crown corporations and agencies. I pointed out that over 200,000 persons are employed in that sector; that there are immense variations in the degree of accountability to Parliament for the activities of the sector with respect to personnel policies, hiring and promotion rights and collective bargaining policies.

I pointed out, too, Mr. Speaker, that some Crown corporations and agencies have now developed to the point

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where, in effect, there is little if any supervision of what they are doing by the elected Members of Parliament. I pointed out, for example, the problem in the science sector. The Senate Committee on Science Policy has pointed out that in one case hundreds of millions of dollars were spent without any tight or adequate review of priorities or national objectives.

I also pointed out my concern that the head of a Crown corporation says he does not report to the minister, but that through the minister he reports directly to Parliament—thus claiming a status, and I think with good legal basis, similar to that enjoyed by the Auditor General. The difference in the case of the Auditor General is that there is a Standing Committee of this House to review his activities. In the case of the head of the Public Service Commission there is no comparable arrangement for review.

I was pointing out, too, that the same kind of problem seems to have developed in regard to the National Capital Commission. I note that the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Andras) who is designated as the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs was recently made responsible for this sector. I am confident that one of the things he will do is to review the program of the National Capital Commission. Those of us who have followed its activities have been pleased with the fresh ideas, vigour and renewed emphasis which have come as a result of the appointments in the past year. We look forward to action on a new bridge to Hull, which I am sure will be welcomed by all people in the area. We know it is very much needed.

We are only asking that there be adequate consultation with the municipal authorities on both sides of the river which will have the responsibility for guaranteeing the access points and approaches. This involves a very substantial project when one considers the planning which has taken place over a number of years and the reports, the making of which the federal government has participated in and consented to, of previous years. We have now seen the recognition that changes are necessary. I think there is a great deal of merit in the proposals. We ask only that there be adequate and prior consultation in an orderly way.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I hope that the suggestion which has been endorsed at other times and places, namely, that there should be a joint committee of this House and the other place to review the work of the National Capital Commission in this area, will be considered by the government at an early date. I sincerely hope, as the member representing Ottawa West, that among the items which will be profitably considered by such a committee will be an examination of the recommendations of volume V of the report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, in which some very serious charges were made concerning the administration of the national capital, the city of Ottawa.

I hope that in such a way the recommendations will be examined and that the city and other groups which feel they have been unjustifiably attacked in the report—one which is altogether different in tone from previous