

Financial Administration Act

been told it would be looked into but to date it has been totally ignored. This is a very major gap in this legislation.

The final point I would like to cover, Mr. Speaker, is the mandate of Crown corporations. This is a problem which has developed in recent years as Crown corporations have suffered some setbacks, and I use that word in a very gentle way. There have been instances such as this with AECL and with Canertech, where the Crown corporations, with the full financial support of the Government of Canada, have moved into areas which are not covered by their mandate at all. The result has been very unfair competition between these Crown corporations and the private sector, which previously has been able to look at that area of business as part of its own area of responsibility.

Let me give the example of Canertech. It is doing retrofits on buildings which involves a very extensive capital expenditure. What Canertech is saying to the owners of the buildings is: "We will do this business for you. We will pay for the total capital cost of it and you pay us by the savings which you make on the heating and air conditioning as a result of the retrofit". This is a very good deal. It is a deal which no one can refuse. But it is a deal which no private sector company could possibly offer. I say in the best of parliamentary spirit to the Parliamentary Secretary, since the Minister is not here, to take back this thought of giving Crown corporations and federal Government wholly-owned companies such a mandate and give them a much clearer mandate so that they are restricted in their ability to compete on unfair terms with the private sector.

In conclusion, this Bill is a major disappointment to us as Members of Parliament. We have no confidence that the Government has learned the lessons of the past and that is an overwhelming reason not only for a change of government but to scrap this Bill and allow a new government which understands the problem to bring in better legislation which will deal effectively with the situation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Guilbault): Are there questions or comments? Resuming debate.

Mr. Albert Cooper (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this debate because I believe it is a very important debate. All of us realize that Crown corporations have taken an increasingly important role in implementing the policy of this Government. As a result, any changes which are made to the way in which these Crown corporations can act, in the way they can respond and generally do their business, becomes increasingly important to deal with in this House.

First in my remarks today I would like to comment on what essentially we had hoped to see in the Bill, in fact what, I suppose, we expected to see in this particular piece of legislation. What we wanted to see dealt with was ministerial responsibility for Crown corporations, which becomes very important when we look at a simple example, one with which I am familiar, of Canada Post. Time and time again we have addressed questions regarding that particular Crown corpora-

tion in this House of Commons only to have the Minister say: "I will have to check with the responsible people in Canada Post. I will have to see what they say". The Minister never gives a direct, straight answer here in the House of Commons. It is always a circuitous answer. That is the kind of thing which we as parliamentarians want to address because we see it as being absolutely essential to make sure that Crown corporations are responsible to Parliament.

The second thing we had hoped to see in this particular piece of legislation is a statement of principle on the role of Crown corporations. What is happening with them? In what direction are they intending to move? That has to be important to any kind of parliamentary overview of Crown corporations in our present set-up.

Third, we looked for a classification system of Crown corporations which was based essentially on the level of subsidization which they received from the Government. In other words, if you have a Crown corporation which is accepting a high level of funding from Parliament, then obviously it has to be very much accountable to Parliament because it must be responsible for the use of public funds, taxpayers' money. On the other hand, if a Crown corporation receives little or no funding from Parliament, perhaps then we can be a little less stringent in relation to that corporation.

The fourth thing we saw as being significant and important to this legislation is that there should be controls over Crown corporation subsidiaries. In other words, the subsidiaries of any particular Crown corporation must be held accountable, must be responsible and must in some way answer to Parliament, thereby to Members of Parliament, and ultimately to the Canadian people.

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The fifth thing we were looking for is comprehensive public business plans. The Canadian people have a right to know where any public agency is going. They have a right to know what kind of plans are being made for that agency and in which direction it intends to move.

The sixth thing we looked for is very important. It is an effective and meaningful audit by the Auditor General. That is very important when we consider the number of examples we have seen lately that have demonstrated waste by Government.

We also wanted to have some form of standardized accounting procedures. We have heard a lot of discussions on the significance of comprehensive auditing lately. We feel a need to have those accounting procedures standardized.

The eighth thing which we felt was essential was to have boards of directors comparable to those in the private sector. In other words, they must have some clout, authority, impact and ability to give direction to the organization they are dealing with.

The final thing which we were looking for is something which I personally feel is extremely important. We wanted to see a joint committee of the House of Commons and the