

Financial Administration

these annual statements. I should like the Minister of Trade and Commerce to tell us just why these annual statements have not been placed before the agricultural committee for the last three years.

Mr. Howe: The annual report of the wheat board was placed before the agricultural committee in 1949. I have said many times, as reports of crown companies are laid on the table of the house, that if any committee was interested in having the reports referred to them I would be delighted to sponsor such reference. I made that offer to the agricultural committee this year but I was informed that the committee did not care to hear the officers of the wheat board.

Mr. Wright: That is hardly a correct statement. That has not been done for the last three sessions. Last year I wrote the chairman of the agricultural committee asking that the committee be called together for the purpose of considering amendments to the Canada Grain Act and I was told that the committee was not going to be called together. If the committee had been called it was my intention to ask that the accounts of the Canadian wheat board be placed before it. Although I was a member of that committee I was refused the right to have the committee called together to consider the Canada Grain Act.

Mr. Howe: The committee could have been called together to examine the report of the wheat board if that had been the wish of the committee. Evidently it was not. If my hon. friend called their attention to it and the committee did not take action he can hardly blame the minister. I would have been delighted to refer the report to the committee. As a matter of fact, I made inquiry as to when the officers of the wheat board could be present in Ottawa and I gave that information to the chairman of the committee.

Mr. Wright: The committee did not meet although it was requested that they should. I am not blaming the minister for that because it is not his responsibility. It is the responsibility of the government to call a committee when a member asks that it be called.

Mr. Sinclair: I was asked earlier about the St. Lawrence seaway and I have been advised that when the Minister of Transport was piloting through the bill he said that that would be regarded as a crown corporation and therefore would come within section 76 (3) of this bill.

Mr. Knowles: He also gave the undertaking that the necessary order in council would be passed.

Mr. Adamson: I was interested in the method of financing that necessary work.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): The question raised by the hon. member for Melfort has been left in a most unsatisfactory position. I do not think it is a very practical answer for the Minister of Trade and Commerce to give when he says that a committee could ask to have a report brought before it if it so desired. There are some crown corporations for which there is no relevant committee. I think the hon. member for Melfort has made a practical suggestion. After all, let us be realistic about this. Committees always have a government majority and do not meet unless the government wishes them to meet. Some practical means should be provided, even though it is nothing more than an undertaking.

These crown corporations are becoming increasingly important, and with the various things that are on people's minds it should not be left to the initiative of somebody, we do not know who, to decide that this shall be done with these reports. In the name of common sense, let us devise some plan. Either the minister or the parliamentary assistant stated that it was a reasonable thing to do. If it is a reasonable thing to do, why not take reasonable means to see that it is done.

Mr. Sinclair: This Financial Administration Act does not provide the means of seeing that it is done. Once a report is tabled in parliament it is in the possession of the House of Commons, not of the government. It is quite true that today the annual reports of the C.N.R., the T.C.A. and the C.B.C. are referred to committees. The Minister of Trade and Commerce has stated that he is more than willing to have the reports of other crown corporations referred to committees.

It has been said that there are some crown corporations which do not come within the ambit of existing committees, but I would point out that the annual reports of all but four of the crown corporations are contained in the public accounts, and even those four will be after this year, and the public accounts committee could consider any which did not fall clearly within the jurisdiction of existing committees.

The hon. member for Melfort has pointed out that for the second time the public accounts committee has recommended that the house should refer these reports to committees when they are tabled, but I repeat that the Financial Administration Act is not an act under which we should consider just how annual reports should be dealt with after presentation to parliament.