

Financial Administration Act

clogged up with the skeletons of the past. It is not really possible for the present Government to open up the window on Crown corporations, because if it were to do that, it would bring to light all the ways in which it has manipulated Crown corporations in the past and all the secrets it wants to see remain hidden.

I would suspect that if there were this public scrutiny, the resultant legislation might wish to incorporate within itself the provision for privatization of Crown corporations. There is a growing trend toward privatization. More and more Canadians are realizing that there are many things which the private sector can do better than can the governmental sector. The problem is that there is no fixed set of rules for the privatization of Crown corporations. The Minister of Transport (Mr. Axworthy) is to be complimented on his action in undertaking to privatize the Northern Canada Transportation Company. However, we do not know how he is going to do that. There are still some reservations on the part of members of the public, certainly members of the Opposition, as to whether he might give this to some of his political friends in some way or another. Therefore, any Crown corporation legislation should incorporate rules and guidelines for their privatization.

● (1115)

I want to say something about Bill C-25, the next Bill we will probably have to deal with. It will follow as a natural corollary to this Bill, and I think both C-24 and C-25 should be dealt with together over this six-month period advocated by the Hon. Member for St. John's West. If that were to take place, the whole question of Crown corporations could be dealt with in a much more businesslike way in order to achieve a much greater degree of parliamentary accountability than that proposed by the Government at the present time.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to participate in the debate on Bill C-24 and on the motion by the Hon. Member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie) to put off consideration of this Bill for some period of time. The Hon. Member has made a very logical request of the House. This Bill must be given consideration as part of an over-all package forming the order of business which the Government puts before the House. Bill C-24 is only part of the Government's over-all policy towards Crown corporations. Bill C-25 relates to companies such as de Havilland and Canadair, the mixed enterprises, so to speak. There are some very major omissions in this particular Bill which we hope will be taken up in Bill C-25, but we will not know that for sure until we get it into committee. I believe it is important that we look at these two Bills side by side.

There is another factor as well, Mr. Speaker, that of the position of Crown corporations under the competition Bill which is before us but is not yet into committee. The position the Government takes as it relates to Crown corporations under that particular legislation is also an important part of the package. As you can see, there is a very clear logic behind the motion of the Hon. Member for St. John's West.

Over and above that, I want to say as strongly as I can that this closure motion on the part of the Government is wrong because the Bill, as it has been presented, does not address the problems of Crown corporations as they appear to us in this House or as they appear to Canadians on a regular basis when they read about them. People are aware of this subculture of government consisting of Crown corporations. Some 265,000 people work for Crown corporations with some \$65 billion in assets under their control. However, if you ask any Canadian if they could tell you what we have in mind, if they believe the bureaucracy and government spending is out of control, that the Government has lost control of the enterprises it is responsible for, the first thing that will come to their mind invariably is that Crown corporations have been allowed to proliferate. There has been no degree of financial or operating control. That is the point the average Canadian focuses on, that we must get better control of Crown corporations.

● (1120)

This point has not been addressed nearly as extensively as we had hoped it would be in this particular piece of legislation. That is why closure is wrong here. That is why it is important for the Government to take this Bill back and address the key problems of accountability and lack of responsibility which have been apparent over the past few years and have resulted in billions of dollars being lost at a time when we have huge government deficits. In essence, Mr. Speaker, huge amounts of money are being stolen from the next generation by this generation.

There are too many gaps in the Bill. It is a flawed piece of legislation. That is why we say it should be taken back to the drawing board. It is inadequate to address the problem. We need something which is more realistic and more akin to the legislation which the Clark Government introduced in 1979.

I would like to discuss briefly some of the aspects of the Bill which do not address the problem. Let us look at the Bill itself. It is enabling legislation. It is a blank cheque. There are no regulations. I do not believe that we, as Members of Parliament, should be asked to consider this Bill until those regulations are in place because of the importance to the legislation and to the operations of government which those regulations represent.

In the summer of 1981 we were considering Bill C-48, the Canada Oil and Gas Act. At that time we asked for the regulations. There was a tremendous amount of ministerial discretion within that Bill. The Bill was riddled with opportunities for the Minister to apply his own thinking rather than the policy of Parliament. Time and again we have seen how that Minister and the subsequent Minister have distorted the intentions of Bill C-48, as set out at the committee stage, through their actions under the vast amount of ministerial discretion provided in that Bill. That is what is missing from our consideration and that is another reason why we should be postponing consideration of the Bill. Too much is left to the Minister's or to Cabinet's discretion and there is not enough