

Crown Corporations

spending had been diminishing rather than increasing, but there is an increasing trend toward what I consider to be a deflection away from the principle for which parliament was originally set up. Basically, I think the original and perhaps only purpose of parliament was to make a very close examination and give final approval or rejection of the spending of tax dollars. I have heard it said in this house that really this is the main purpose of the House of Commons, to pass estimates and approve the spending of tax dollars.

The matter which concerns me, Mr. Speaker, and I believe should concern every member of the house, is that increasing amounts of tax dollars are being put at the disposal of non-elected people and bodies whose only responsibility to the public, through this house, is to a minister of the crown. We all know the position of ministers of the crown who report to the house on behalf of crown corporations when questions are put to them. I suggest that the only reply they can make is that they will refer the questions to the crown corporations concerned and will report back to the house. The minister really only serves as a channel to obtain the opinions of people serving on a non-elected board.

May I, Mr. Speaker, in case we do not realize the amount of money involved quickly run down some of the figures about which we are talking today. If I might digress a little, when this motion was placed on the order paper a little over two years ago considerable attention and publicity was given to it in the press, and some interest by way of correspondence was also shown.

I am not saying that the motion is perfect in all respects, but the idea of more direct control over spending by the House of Commons did seem to receive quite favourable comment and commendation in the press. At any rate, one article outlined the three types of agencies or corporations. There were three groups: the agency corporations, the proprietary corporations and other corporations.

In the first group appear such giants as Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, with a budget of \$62 million. Then there were Crown Assets Disposal Corporation with a budget of \$6.5 million, the National Capital Commission with an \$84.4 million budget, the National Harbours Board with a \$470.7 million budget, and Northern Canada Power Commission with a budget of \$28.5 million.

[Mr. Walker.]

The figures in the second category are as follows, and I presume that these figures are now two years out of date. There are such proprietary corporations as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, with a budget of \$108.3 million, the Canadian National Railways with assets of \$3,754 million, Overseas Telecommunications, \$61.8 million, Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, \$2,000 million, St. Lawrence Seaway Authority, \$507.3 million and, of course, there is the Bank of Canada with assets of \$3,300 million.

My point, Mr. Speaker, is that these are terrific sums of money which have been placed in the hands of corporations some of which operate at a profit. Of course, profit is a relative thing, so I do not think that is a great point; but some of them do operate under a deficit, and I think that is a very pertinent consideration. We have placed huge sums of money at the disposal of these corporations, some of which are subsidized with the taxpayers' money, but no direct control over them is exercised by members of parliament.

My understanding as a representative of a constituency is that one of my duties here is to keep track, as much as I can, of taxpayers' dollars and how and where they are being spent. Some people fear the political control which one member of parliament might exert over the board of directors of one of these crown corporations. However, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that this is a fallacious argument against this proposal. I cannot see that one member of parliament, even if he be most loquacious, in the minority position he would be in on a board of 15 or 20 directors would have a very disastrous effect on that board.

Mr. Churchill: Would the hon. member answer a question?

Mr. Walker: Yes, sir.

Mr. Churchill: Would the hon. member not be disturbed if, say, the hon. member for Lapointe (Mr. Grégoire) became a director of the C.N.R.?

Mr. Walker: No, Mr. Speaker, I would not at all. I say that because, in the limited way in which we examine these crown corporations in our house committees, the hon. member for Lapointe has in my judgment done a very good job. I believe that besides such examination in committee any member of this house should be permitted to bring a public opinion before a board of directors of a crown corporation, something which in my judgment