

Energy, Mines and Resources

For that reason alone it would be wrong automatically to confer agent of Her Majesty status in these instances on these companies which, by and large, will be operating as competitors in the marketplace. However, the privileges and immunities which are conferred by the granting of agent of Her Majesty status goes well beyond simply the ability to thumb one's nose at the Combines Investigation Act.

Equally important and equally odious is the fact that these companies operating in the marketplace would not raise money on their own credit rating. They would not have to establish that they were credit worthy, that they were well managed, that they were good companies or that they were worthy companies to which to lend money. When an agent of Her Majesty enters into markets and tries to raise money, an agent of Her Majesty does so with the credit rating of the Government of Canada. That means these companies automatically have a triple A credit rating. Their competitors in the marketplace have to raise money on the basis of their own credit rating. These Crown corporations, being granted agent of Her Majesty status, will automatically be able to do so with the best terms possible, that is, the best commercial terms available to the Government of Canada.

It goes one step beyond that. In cases where these companies are ill-managed and where ultimately we find they go bankrupt and there are massive losses incurred, as was the case with Consolidated Computer in which \$125 million was poured down the drain, what happens in the case of an agent of Her Majesty? In a case where an agent of Her Majesty has incurred debts and goes bankrupt, those debts are automatically charges upon the consolidated revenue fund of Canada. Parliament does not have any discretion in a case like that. The people of Canada, the taxpayers of Canada, are automatically responsible for any debts which are incurred by these Crown corporations.

No one knows—and if the President of the Treasury Board in any way disputes this, I invite him to participate in the debate—what the potential liability of agents of Her Majesty is or how much the taxpayers of Canada could ultimately be charged for mismanagement by Crown corporations which are agents of Her Majesty. Nor do we know when we are asked to pass this legislation tonight how many Crown corporations will be created, what will be their scope, what will be their size and what sort of debts they will be running up for which the taxpayers of Canada would be responsible. If tonight we grant automatic agent of Her Majesty status, we will be giving an unlimited credit card drawn on the account of the people of Canada to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Lalonde) to be used by any new Crown corporation in the energy field which he chooses to set up. How could members of this House of Commons do that? How could anyone who witnessed the fiasco of the Consolidated Computer case and the loss of \$125 million because of the negligence of the President of the Treasury Board and his colleagues accept that as a practice which would be tolerable for Members of Parliament? Clearly we have a responsibility on us, and clearly the President of the Treasury Board has a direct responsibility on him, to ensure that we do not give this unlimited ability to

Crown corporations to run up debts on behalf of the people of Canada beyond the control of Parliament.

I should make one thing clear, and that is that the government already has the capability through other legislation to confer agent of Her Majesty status on any Crown corporation it chooses. The government can do that today. The issue is not whether in some instances it will be appropriate in the future to confer agent of Her Majesty status on some Crown corporations. The issue is whether Parliament today should be saying for all time that all Crown corporations created under this legislation will automatically be given agent of Her Majesty status. By doing so we will automatically be granting them immunity from combines investigation legislation, will automatically be granting them immunity from some taxes and will automatically be giving them privileges in terms of raising money that their competitors do not have. They will automatically be able to borrow on the government's credit rating and to hold the taxpayers of Canada responsible for their debts, if they are ill-managed.

● (2140)

If the hon. member for Regina West is prepared to do some homework, I would invite him to consider the reports of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on Crown corporations. That committee found that it was essential to bring some control and accountability to Crown corporations. This was after a succession of scandals during the sixties and seventies that involved Crown corporations and the misuse of public funds. I would invite him to look into the Estey report on Air Canada which found there were inadequate controls on these Crown corporations. I would invite him to look at the report of the Lambert Royal Commission on Financial Management and Accountability which recommended that controls be put in place. I would invite him to read the successive reports of the Auditor General of Canada to Parliament which said it was essential to bring in legislation that would ensure that the taxpayers of Canada are protected and that the sort of fiascos that occur when Crown corporations run up unlimited bills and pick the pocket of the taxpayer to pay for them could not happen in the future.

These are not partisan authorities, Mr. Speaker. The public accounts committee represents all parties in this House, and the Auditor General of Canada, a royal commission and a judicial inquiry have some standing. The hon. member for Regina West may scoff at those authorities, but there are some members in this House, Mr. Speaker, who believe they have a responsibility to the taxpayers of Canada. There are some who believe that when they are dealing with billions of dollars they have a responsibility as custodians to ensure that the money is well spent and is not simply poured down the drain.

I have constituents who are smarting because of the present financial situation, who desperately need the money that is being taken from them in taxes, who need assistance from the government. If money is not available to my farmers in the form of assistance but is poured down the drain because of the