

Appointments to Crown Corporations

Mr. Fairweather: The Milk Board.

Mr. Francis:—the Liquor Control Board. My friend opposite had some other suggestion.

Mr. Fairweather: I thought milk should come before liquor.

Mr. Francis: I thought the hon. member referred to liquor. I obviously did him an injustice in that respect. Knowing him as I do, I should not have made such a quick reference. The fact is that something has to be done to try to bring some degree of relationship between the legislative branch and the Crown corporation. The gap has become too wide.

I believe the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) made some comments not too long ago that one would have to define carefully the role of such a member, the principle he would apply and the course of conduct he would have to follow. It has been alleged there would be a conflict of interest. I cannot buy the conflict of interest argument. The man or woman elected to this House does not serve anywhere else. The problem is that he or she does not have an opportunity to gain access to information that is essential to serve the public interest and on which judgments are based. This is where the gap lies.

● (5:30 p.m.)

As far as I am aware, the system in the province of Ontario has worked tolerably well. I am one of those who believe that if we were to adopt this procedure, no additional pay should be given members serving on such a board. This would be contrary to the practice in the province of Ontario. I believe that the pay, allowances and pensions of the members of this House should be decided here. There should be a uniform practice. However, additional responsibilities could be placed on members, based on their own experience, which would give them encouragement to specialize in areas in which they are most competent.

I believe that a very useful principle of public administration could be developed by the adoption of this motion. Individual members could be encouraged and trained to seek out those areas in which they are competent. When members are named to board of directors, I hope it will be on the basis of more than one political persuasion: I hope members from the opposition parties in this House would be named in order to give a balance in

[Mr. Francis.]

making reviews and in trying to determine how the public interest is involved.

I think that anyone who has studied the change in the concept of corporate directors—the province of Ontario recently had occasion to change the law in this regard—will admit there is a much greater degree of responsibility thrust upon those who accept directorships of corporations. Such appointments are not always a bed of roses. However, I think anyone chosen for such task will find a great challenge, an opportunity to contribute in breaking new ground in public administration. Members of Parliament would be able to develop a relationship between the committees of this House and that body which has been referred to by such groups as the Canadian Tax Foundation and others as the lesser public service of Canada, a growing number of people whose accountability to those who established them, at least in regard to some nominal ownership of the operation, is a rather tenuous one in many instances.

Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Fundy-Royal): Mr. Speaker, I am participating in this debate as a result of popular demand, because there will be very few opportunities for my colleagues to hear what I have to say on this matter between now and Easter. I have become interested in taking part principally because the Notice of Motion of the hon. member for Cochrane (Mr. Stewart) has been on the Order Paper for some time and resulted from an initiative of mine. I did not mean to detract from anything that he was doing, but I was able to persuade my colleagues in the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence, when the committee was discussing the International Development Research Centre, that it might be very useful to have a Member of Parliament serve on the board.

This, as the hon. member who has just spoken said, caused some consternation on the part of the minister concerned and I thought for a moment he was going to tear the purple off the cloths. However, the minister was faced with a substantial majority in favour, and after entering several caveats about having members on boards he graciously allowed the committee report to be adopted by Parliament.

My feeling about this matter is not totally in accord with that of the hon. member for Cochrane. I do not want members appointed to boards and commissions merely to act as a brake on or a watchdog over federal spending. There are many avenues, though perhaps