

Crown corporations are continually directed by public servants. A senior associate deputy minister of the Department of Regional Industrial Expansion worked in Montreal for a number of years. He did not have the faintest idea of how a corporation operates or works for profit. The whole proliferation of Crown corporations has allowed spending by the Liberal Government on behalf of taxpayers, for which they will have to pay.

I realize that 10 minutes is a very short time, but I will conclude my brief speech by saying that we will put forth many amendments in committee. We will remove the smoke and mirrors in this Bill. We will recommend directors, not an advisory board but a pure board of directors. We will show that accountability is a prime concern of this Party.

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Mr. Speaker, I have not had an earlier opportunity to participate in the debate on this Bill which purports to be a Bill to assist government and Parliament, in particular, with respect to control over Crown corporations. The reason we are not supportive of this legislation is that it does not do what it pretends to do.

There is no change of government policy with respect to Crown corporations. There is only an alleged change in machinery. There is no real reform. There is no real acceptance of blame for what has happened in the past. We are all familiar with the state of affairs now revealed in Canadair and de Havilland, which show complete lack of control not only by Parliament but by the Government, or if the Government had any control or knowledge, then complete culpable negligence with respect to what happened in those corporations.

Historically the chief powers of Parliament have been powers over the spending of money, over the purse. However, that power has been completely eroded. We have to ask the following question: Why should the Government object to Hon. Members of the House having some real authority with respect to Crown corporations, not through pusillanimous standing committees of the House which have no powers, except such as are granted them by the majority or by the Government, not by make-believe committees? Why is the Government reluctant to give Members of this House some real authority and control? Why should Ministers of the Crown not welcome assistance of Members of this House with the task of controlling the bureaucracy? I forget the total number now in the Public Service, but it is in the area of 300,000 people. Ministers, certainly most of them in this Government, if not all—there may be one or two exceptions—are unable to know, understand or control what happens in their Department, except on the fringes. They have to trust the bureaucracy of the Public Service to advise them of what is happening.

● (1520)

The Minister of Transport (Mr. Axworthy) has a fantastically large and varied Department. He does not know what is happening in the interstices of that Department or what is happening in the airport at St. John's, Newfoundland, or whatever the issue might be. Why should a Minister object if

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this House helps him? Why should the Government object if committees of this House are given sufficient authority to start investigating and finding out for themselves what Government Crown corporations are doing?

If five years ago we had had a committee, either together with representatives of the other place or just a committee of this House, whose job it was to look into, investigate and raid the bureaucracy of the Crown corporations with the powers of subpoena, investigation and summoning witnesses, and if such a committee had looked at de Havilland or Canadair, I venture to say that this country may well have saved hundreds of millions, if not billions of dollars, to which we are now committed. Even if conscious decisions were made to continue financing those corporations in such amounts and in such a way for such purposes, at least the public would have known about it years before they did know.

When I was Minister of Finance—it is true for a brief time just eight months—I had no time to consider what was happening with Crown corporations that were supposed to report to the Government of Canada. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, I was not lying around on my butt doing nothing. I worked at least 12 to 14 hours a day.

Mr. Tobin: You had your kicks. That's it.

Mr. Crosbie: Are you attempting to attack my butt? Is the Member interjecting with a butt? When the putative Minister of State for Youth becomes a Minister of State for Youth, we will listen to him with all the attention that that onerous and heavy responsibility will entail. In the meantime, the Speaker provided a nursery two or three years ago. That young man should go on to the nursery and deal with people of his own mental agility. By the way, I want the people in Corner Brook and Stephenville to know that these childish interjections are coming from their Member, soon to be ex-Member. The Member's name is Brian Tobin, if I might sneak that in for those now watching down on the west coast of Newfoundland.

When I was Minister of Finance, working as hard as I could, I had no time to consider what Crown corporations that reported to Finance were doing. I remember requests coming from de Havilland and Canadair which, by the way, we put a stop to. They were having the Government guarantee their borrowing. This never came to anyone's attention because they were doing it by letters of comfort.

It was felt to be all right for the Government to give financial concerns lending money to those companies letters of comfort, saying that the Government knew about the loans and would stand behind these corporations. That never came before Parliament or the House of Commons. It did not receive public attention because it was not a formal guarantee. For years those companies were financed secretly behind the scenes. The directors appointed by the Government apparently did not feel they had to intervene or stop the ruinous course of those companies. They did not have adequate instructions.

This Bill is an utter failure. It is another piece of Government flatulence because it does not provide for any real control by people sitting in this House, both on the Government side