

Energy, Mines and Resources

In summary, the decisions to continue the support of CCI were probably made in accordance with the normal GAAP criteria up to and including the 1971/72 restructuring. The decisions since that time have been influenced less by objective business judgment than they have by the government ownership of the company, the various individual perceptions of the reasons for supporting CCI, the EDB's perception of government policy, significant conflicts of interest, poor quality information and advice that always offered a glimmer of hope that all was not lost.

This particular fiasco involving a corporation which came to be under the ownership of the government resulted in a cost to the taxpayers of Canada of over \$100 million. I have in my hand letters passing between the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Gray) and the President of the Treasury Board, exchanged on a confidential basis. The President of the Treasury Board made it clear that the government was in a very vulnerable position, but the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce still urged him to put in more government money to try to cut the losses. If the legislation before us is approved here today, we are putting the taxpayers of Canada in a position where they could be liable for literally billions of dollars of losses. With this legislation we will be creating a breed of Crown corporation which is above the law, which will operate in competition in the marketplace and will not be subject to the same criteria as other private sector corporations. We are ensuring that there will not be adequate parliamentary consultation either in the creation of these Crown corporations or in their management on a regular basis. In Bill C-102 there is not even a requirement that these Crown corporations to be incorporated be included in the schedules of the Financial Administration Act. The government did not even go that far, yet it says that it wants unlimited ability to incorporate these corporations and to make the taxpayers of Canada responsible for their debts.

When the vote is taken on this matter in a few minutes, I hope Your Honour will look down the benches of cabinet ministers in front of you and that you will ask yourself to how many of them you would be prepared to give signing authority on your credit card. To how many of them would you give authority to use their business judgment as to when it would be appropriate to run up a charge on your account? Mr. Speaker, your answer would probably be "None of them!" In particular, would you give that authority to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Lalonde) on the strength of his performance concerning energy issues in recent days? Surely you would not. However, that is precisely what Parliament will do today. It will give the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources the authority to incorporate unlimited new Crown corporations and to make the people of Canada liable for their debts.

This is a bad bill. It does not deserve the support of Parliament. All hon. members who are concerned about parliamentary control and ensuring that the taxpayers' dollars are protected have a responsibility to vote against this bill on third reading.

● (1730)

Mr. Lyle S. Kristiansen (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, in speaking briefly on third reading, I have a few comments. This

bill is largely about open government versus closed government, when it comes to the operations of Crown corporations, in determining what fields we as representatives of our electors feel it is appropriate and wise for our government to be engaged in.

Most hon. members recognize that from time to time the government must go into the marketplace in one form or another. Unfortunately, the history of much of Canadian government in the past has been that when we go into the marketplace we go in with one arm tied behind our backs. In dealing with the larger, centralized elements of the business community, we find that our governments play poker with all of their cards face up or with half of their cards face up, and consequently get into trouble.

Time and time again the private sector of the energy industry has said to the government: "You give us the price we want, at both the front end and the back end, give us the tax incentives and the write-offs and the taxes we want, or we will pack up and go home." Any government worth its salt has had to face the challenge, either that it must give in completely to that kind of threat of a capital strike by the private sector in that field, or it must be prepared to go into the business itself as an alternative.

We in this party as much as anyone else recognize the situation presented to the Canadian people. We know there are times when the government must involve itself in the major sectors in the marketplace. Our problem with this bill is that the government, meeting behind closed doors and without any reference to the elected representatives of the people, can determine for itself in what manner it will act. The official opposition and we in this party put forward amendments which attempted to introduce realistic checks and balances. We did so in order that we ourselves may be assured, and so that we in turn may assure the people we represent, that the decision being made by the government is an appropriate and wise decision, and that the new institutions will perform a valid and responsible function in the marketplace.

In its own amendments the government has taken some cognizance of the awkward position as regards the Senate that existed in the initial legislation. We are still left with the situation, specified in exact terminology in this bill, where there can be a government and a House of Commons both agreeing it is necessary to have a Crown corporation in place to perform a certain function; and a Senate which disagrees. Many people in this country believe—I am not going to say rightly or wrongly at this point—that the Senate is a bastion of the rights of the privileged and a bastion of the rights of property. Whether it is the Senate of Canada or the British House of Lords, that is their main function within parliamentary democracy in the western world. It alone is going to be able to say: "No way."

We know that the Senate has certain prerogatives within our parliamentary system, but in very few specific pieces of legislation where it is not required do we enter that veto in, do we see it specified. We had a great debate on that matter of the Senate's right, with respect to the Constitution, of the Senate insisting on its right to veto changes to its own composition and its own nature. Here we are again with another piece