

Government Organization

of the foremost recipients of patronage from construction companies across the country.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gilbert: There is no doubt about it. If the hon. member were to read the report on election expenses, he would see the tremendous amount of money received by his party for election purposes with no indication from where it was received. Where did it come from? I thought the hon. member would know, Mr. Speaker, but seemingly he does not. I recommend that he contact the right sources within his party to indicate where these moneys came from.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Richard): Order, please. I humbly but strongly suggest that this type of discussion on either side will not solve the problem of whether the Department of Public Works should be a Crown corporation. If it might clean up the Department of Public Works, it would not make it a Crown corporation.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I humbly suggest that the question is not the discussion that may take place between two members. The hon. member has made charges. He has a responsibility to inform the House of his knowledge so that the matter can be properly investigated. To make raw statements and charges is only wishful thinking. It is only talking for the sake of talk.

Mr. Gilbert: If I may reply, Mr. Speaker, I am amazed that a backbencher has not read the report on election expenses.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Richard): Order, please. If hon. members are not satisfied with the ruling of the Chair and, in particular, are not satisfied with the conduct of an hon. member, they should follow the proper procedures and deal with the matter in another manner.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy LeBlanc (Rimouski): Mr. Speaker, if I understood correctly the motion presented by the hon. member for Broadview (Mr. Gilbert), he wanted, first of all, the production of copies of all studies that have been undertaken by the government regarding the consideration being given to converting the Public Works Department into a Crown Corporation. Now, we know that, on November 4, 1970, the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Laing) refused to produce such documents because he considered them, and still does, of a confidential nature.

The mover then asked that the motion be transferred for debate.

There are two important aspects to be considered in this motion: first, the possibility of reorganizing or transforming the Department of Public Works into a Crown corporation, secondly, the confidential nature of the documents mentioned by the mover of the motion. As a matter of fact, I was under the impression that the purpose of the debate would be to discuss the reasons which had prompted the minister to consider these documents as confidential.

[Mr. Gilbert.]

I was surprised and disappointed also to see that the mover of the motion, perhaps inadvertently, has brought the House to discuss very minor questions which never reflect credit on Parliament, an institution upon which the eyes of all Canadians are focused.

If we are convinced that we have a serious part to play in the House, we should forget about these petty questions which make us waste our time. That is one of the most serious charges that our fellow citizens utter daily, concerning delays and waste of time to which we sometimes fall victims.

And since the hon. member has levelled certain charges against members of the Liberal party, he cannot accuse them of needlessly delaying debates, on minor and unimportant matters. I think that he himself, and perhaps some of his colleagues—with all due respect—ought to examine their conscience every night, concerning those questions of delay and waste of time on useless details which have nothing to do with the development of our country. They discuss trifles and afterwards they speak of truly important issues such as unemployment and other similar questions.

At any rate, the hon. member spoke long enough about the present and future management of the Department of Public Works. Let us say that it is as a result of a statement made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) that he realized that studies could be made to alter the present status of the Department of Public Works which would become a Crown corporation.

● (5:20 p.m.)

I respect his opinion that this department should become a corporation. Although I am not an expert in this field, he will none the less allow me to express my opinion that we should always be very cautious about promoting a project to change a government structure into a Crown corporation.

I was impressed, among other things, by the fact that in the motion the hon. member accuses government members of not taking the necessary steps to convince the minister to table the documents concerned.

But since the department alleges that the documents are of a confidential nature, I believe that documents of the public administration in general are the property of the public and if necessary, Canadian citizens and most of all members of Parliament should be able to consult them. On the other hand, he will no doubt admit that some documents must remain confidential to ensure proper administration and public protection.

The documents of the administration belong to the public, not only in Canada but throughout the world. However, governments have kept some documents secret and the propriety of such action has often been challenged by experts and other citizens who needed the information.

If we study what has been done in this regard in other countries, we find that they passed laws on information and production of public documents.

It is reported that in Sweden, since long ago, all documents can be made public. On the other hand, there are