

Auditor General Act

bill does nothing for the House of Commons. I somehow have the old-fashioned idea that the House of Commons exists as a place in which hon. members representing some 23 million people and a large number of taxpayers can examine with care and in different ways exactly how the money provided by the taxpayers of Canada is used.

● (1710)

As I said a while ago, we have just been through, and are still engaged in, an exercise where the public accounts committee is struggling desperately under the antiquated rules inflicted upon it to try and find some information about the CANDU sales and Polysar. There has been a massive lack of success. It is not that members of all parties in this committee have not been struggling diligently and honestly in trying to secure that information. However, it is being denied them. That is one of the reasons the first amendment I proposed, which is now under consideration by Mr. Speaker, sought to provide for a more fundamental way of securing information. As the hon. member for Edmonton West said, information is the thing which this House is continually denied.

Earlier this afternoon, when dealing with a question of privilege, there was a very sharp observation. I regard it as a judicial statement, namely, that there is no responsibility on the part of the government to provide information. There is no truer statement. I have been out of this House for the past few days. Other interesting phenomena have been carried on here. Members of this party and the New Democratic Party have been trying to find out information. When I saw one of my constituents not long ago, he said to me, "Jed, are you going back there to find out from the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Goyer) why they are not going to give us some of the facts?"

I told my constituent that under the rules which prevail in this House, when a minister has made a statement the members of the House are compelled to accept that statement. My friend said, "That is a very silly rule. Fortunately, I am not bound by it. I have a very healthy skepticism with regard to what the Prime Minister and the Minister of Supply and Services said. I am glad I do not have to abide by the rules and accept what has been said in the House by the right hon. gentleman and the hon. gentleman." I think he had a point. Being a member of the House, while in the House I am bound to accept it, although my constituent had a very sensible and healthy approach to which we in this House could possibly give some thought.

In any event, what I am seeking to do by this amendment is change clause 14 so that the public accounts committee will no longer be frustrated by the problems which they have faced and are still facing in their diligent and difficult attempt to come to grips with the scandal of CANDU and Polymer sales. It is obvious to many members of the committee that while some information may come out, there will be sufficient cover-ups. Outside a stroke of luck, it will be impossible for that committee to make the kind of report it should make so that we in this House, and through us the people of Canada,

[Mr. Baldwin.]

will know exactly what games are being played by some of these agencies.

One reason which inspired me to move motion No. 6 is that when reading through the transcript of the proceedings of the committee I discovered there was utter contempt shown by the witnesses appearing before the committee for the views, anxieties and members of the committee to dig information out of them. Any witness appearing in any court in which I have practiced adopting the same attitude as those witnesses would have gone to jail for contempt, as they should have. However, these people are free to go throughout the country. They have no obligation, no responsibility and no sanctions against them. The committee has not been able to get the information. Because the committee has not been able to get it, the House has not been able to get it and, therefore, the country has not been able to get it. On how many occasions will that be repeated?

The purpose behind my motion is to provide a compulsory responsibility on a Crown corporation or a subsidiary of a Crown corporation to ensure that the auditor general secures copies of reports and accounts; that the auditor general "shall"—not "may"—request a Crown corporation to furnish him with such further information as he requests. That is not the case at the present time. Finally, if he does not get it, he shall so advise the governor in council, who may direct the officers to furnish it.

If that sort of provision had been in the existing Financial Administration Act, the previous auditor general, Mr. Maxwell Henderson, and the present Auditor General would now have had, by compulsion, information which they were entitled to have, or someone would have gone to jail. That is the kind of power which should rest with the auditor general, and ultimately in us as his employer. He is our agent, our servant, although you would not know it from this bill. Consequently, at the appropriate time the knowledge of the auditor general would be the knowledge of this House. Affairs like CANDU and Polymer would no longer be permitted.

It is not just the presence of the act or provisions of this kind, but knowledge on the part of those who may well be wrongdoers, that there is a provision whereby information can be obtained. When there is that sort of provision contained in legislation, people who would contemplate doing wrong would be aware of it. Obviously, it would constitute a major deterrent. Without it, I see no reason why we could not have a repeat of the CANDU and Polymer affair running well into the future. It is in the hope that we can give to the people of Canada some belief that we mean business and will try and avoid a repetition of these incidents that I move this motion.

Hon. Robert K. Andras (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, once again we discussed this very thoroughly when we were dealing with the details in committee. I believe the effect of the proposed changes are twofold. First, the expansion of the information that is to be submitted to the auditor general is really a question of word meaning. There is no argument about the fact that he should have access to complete information from Crown corporations and the like. I