

Financial Administration Act

"sabotage" and "espionage" are left undefined, leaving the Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) and the Cabinet far-reaching powers. They will have discretion under that Bill to do anything. Will the President of the Treasury Board and the Cabinet not have discretion under this bill to continue to do anything they want with Crown corporations? Even the so-called "watch-dog" of the agency would be powerless, as it would be made up, as we know, of political appointees.

This Bill, like the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Bill, seems to me to show once again the arrogance that this Government takes unto itself by saying: "We can look after you. We will make the final determination, because we will put before you only vague and general wording, and we will retain the far-reaching powers in the scope of what we want to do". Mr. Speaker, that kind of power in the hands of any government or cabinet is dangerous. What we really want to see is that kind of power and that kind of accountability reintroduced into the House of Commons. This Bill does not do that.

I want to come, finally, to the whole question of the lack of respect for parliamentary accountability that has been exhibited by this Government with increasing rapidity ever since its re-election in 1980. This Bill is like others. The Government has continued on its favoured path of excessive administrative discretion by the Cabinet. It ignores the need for extensive ministerial responsibility and financial accountability. Despite claims to the contrary, when one studies the Bill, it does not bring Crown corporations under control. It actually gives more power to the Cabinet. I would say that it is a case of patronage appointments, which are certainly allowable under this piece of legislation. Those patronage appointments and the way that the Government will be able to go about them ignore the rights of Parliament and the public to scrutinize all of the Government's decisions.

In fact, the power of the Cabinet reaches down into the corporate structure itself. I would say that it thereby reduces the role and the importance of the directors of Crown corporations. In this way, it makes it much less possible to trace the responsibility for poor performance and inefficiency. It would, in fact, make it virtually impossible to hold anyone accountable for such failures as Canadair and de Havilland, which, despite record-breaking corporate losses over the last three years, retain virtually the same executive officers. There is no way to get at them. This Bill certainly would not make it any easier to do that.

We have seen, as I have said, a number of pieces of legislation come through the House in the current session of Parliament where the Government has literally failed to deal with the major problem. In some cases we have managed to force the Government to make amendments. That was certainly the case earlier this month with the borrowing authority Bill, Bill C-21. We said that the Government had to be more accountable to Parliament. Eventually we forced some amendments, not enough but some amendments, to that particular Bill. We opposed that Bill because the Government would not be responsible on a ministerial basis or have financial account-

ability, which are the very underpinnings of our parliamentary system of government.

This particular piece of legislation is really symptomatic of the weakness and ineptitude of the Government, indeed the ongoing weakness and ineptitude, particularly when it comes to the drafting of legislation which is intended to deal with critical issues. There is an over-all pattern emerging. The Government is content to tinker with nuts and bolts but it will not move to correct serious problems. That, above all, is a commentary on a government that has run out of initiative, energy and ideas.

The Government is old and it is stale. This Government, in its dying and decaying state, is very soon going to have to meet not just the Members of Parliament, it is going to have to meet the people of Canada. They will be the judges of the inept legislation that it has been putting forward. I would say that when the voters of Canada get a chance to have their say on pieces of legislation such as this one, and on the Government now sitting in office, they will reject not only Bill C-24, but they will reject its authors as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert): There follows the ten-minute period for questions and comments. The Hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Foster).

Mr. Foster: I would like to make a couple of comments with respect to the speech made by the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald). I think she left a few things not particularly clear. She suggested that there were something like 315 Crown corporations. I think that if she checks a little closer she will find that there are in fact some 67 parent Crown corporations, another 128 subsidiaries and another 112 corporate interests.

She is suggesting that the Bill does not give complete control for mixed investments and for joint ownerships. I really would like to know just how she would propose to do that. If PetroCan is investing in a joint venture in oil and gas exploration—surely because it is a joint investment activity, perhaps PetroCan's investment is only a small percentage, 5 per cent, 10 per cent, or 20 per cent—it is not possible to deal with that kind of investment in the same way that it is for a parent Crown corporation or for a wholly-owned subsidiary. Those investments have got to be made by the Crown corporation itself and not be subject to directives by the Government.

She also pointed out the criticism of the Auditor General's report. I would like to point out to her that this Bill was drafted in close consultation with recommendations and suggestions by the Auditor General.

I have a couple of other questions to put to the Hon. Member but perhaps I will call it one o'clock.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert): I regret the response of the Hon. Member will have to wait until this afternoon.