

Financial Administration

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that that is a slight overstatement. While crown corporations might be ultimately accountable to parliament, they have not been accountable to parliament in a way that has made it possible for parliament to carefully examine the details of the business of those corporations. I do not believe any crown corporation, unless it deals with some secret operation and the statute creating that corporation places it under some terms of secrecy, should be in a position to deny to parliament, through the minister, any and every detail of its operations which affect its business.

We know that on a number of occasions where questions have been asked concerning crown corporations it has been said that this information could not properly be given. There are cases where operations deal with atomic energy in certain of its aspects—I say “in certain of its aspects” advisedly because I do not believe all the activities in relation to atomic energy should be secret. When it becomes an operation which can be used for peaceful purposes, as it is being used now for certain medical activities and where the operation relates to civilian requirements, then I believe the terms of secrecy should be removed. Subject to cases of that kind, and subject to the reservation of secrecy in the act of incorporation of the crown company, I believe that any questions relating to the business, salaries or any other detail concerning the crown corporation, should be available to the members of this house at any time. Otherwise, we can set up a tremendous branch of public business in this country which is not accountable in the ordinary way to members of parliament. I would hope that this part of the act will be reviewed carefully, and that a clearly defined reservation concerning these terms of secrecy may be introduced, so that all the details of the business of a crown corporation set up by the parliament of Canada or under the authority of the parliament of Canada can be brought fully before the members of this house.

Now, I should like to refer back to the overtaxation which has already been seen this year. In explaining to the public accounts committee the way in which the public business of Canada, particularly the financial business of the country, can best be supervised, I suggest that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Abbott) give some explanation of where he and his officials went so wrong this year. That information would be helpful in trying to draft sections which might prevent a repetition of that tremendous mistake.

[Mr. Drew.]

Mr. James Sinclair (Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I must inform the house that if the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance speaks now he will close the debate.

Mr. Sinclair: —I intend to make only a few remarks. I think the house is indebted for the comments which have been made by the three speakers on this bill. As all three have pointed out, this is probably the key bill of government, and it is only right that the attention of the house should be drawn to it. I would suggest that not only the members of the public accounts committee who will study this bill item by item but other members of parliament can profitably follow the discussions in that committee and get as good a picture as it is possible to get in this parliament of the function of parliamentary control over expenditures.

I will not comment on the remarks on taxation policy made by the financial critic of the official opposition, the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Macdonnell). After all, this bill is not concerned with the methods by which money is raised or with the purposes for which parliament votes that money. It is concerned with the methods by which that money, when raised, is received by the government, held in safekeeping and controlled by the government, and the circumstances under which it is paid out in accordance with either legislation or parliamentary appropriation. It is concerned, of course, with both the internal audit by the office of the comptroller of the treasury, and, perhaps most important of all, as the hon. member for Greenwood and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) have pointed out, the audit by our own servant, the Auditor General, to see that these moneys were spent in accordance with the instructions of parliament.

The first point made by the hon. member for Greenwood was on the transfer of certain powers from the governor in council—that is the cabinet in our ordinary phraseology—to the treasury board. This is certainly a step long overdue, as most hon. members will realize when they look through the record of orders in council. I know that it has been extremely popular for opposition members to call this an order in council government. We have passed tens of thousands of them. But when you actually examine the great bulk of those orders in council it will be found that they are concerned with trivial affairs which, back at the turn of the century when the business