

Energy, Mines and Resources

stood before it would become apparent to all Canadians that the minister was attempting to do an end run on Parliament.

In the course of my remarks tonight, what I want to do is point out that, notwithstanding the cosmetics and the trappings of parliamentary democracy, which the minister has attempted to introduce here, the minister is setting a very dangerous precedent. He is attempting to undermine the ability of parliamentarians to control the way in which the public purse is used. He is attempting to create a mechanism which will allow for the uncontrolled proliferation of Crown corporations in future.

What does this bill do, Mr. Speaker? The first thing it provides is that the government will be able in future to incorporate an unlimited number of Crown corporations, presumably, and predominantly, in the energy field. But, as I will suggest later, the scope could extend well beyond the field of energy. This policy will allow uncontrolled proliferation of Crown corporations. It is a policy which has been under attack in the past by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, by the Auditor General, by the Lambert commission and by members of Parliament from all sides of the House. I see the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) is leaving the House. I do not blame him for trying to slip out discreetly as we get into a matter which falls directly under his jurisdiction.

● (2050)

Within six months, of the Clark government taking office, we tabled in Parliament a comprehensive bill designed to bring some element of accountability and control to Crown corporations. Yet what we find today, more than two years after the Liberal government was restored to office, after two years of assurances from the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) that he takes this matter seriously, is that we have yet to see any comprehensive legislation designed to protect the rights of Parliament and put in place the sort of accountability and control suggested by the Lambert Commission, the Public Accounts Committee and the Auditor General himself.

It is not a new problem, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General, back in his annual report of 1976, pointed out how serious the lack of financial control and accountability of Crown corporations was. It is now some six years later, but we are no better off today than we were then. We are no better off than we were after a succession of incidents leading to special inquiries into AECL, Air Canada, Polysar or other corporations where it was felt actions were taken not becoming a Crown corporation. In that time, with the exception of the nine months in which we were in office, apparently nothing of substance has taken place to try to bring some regime of accountability and control to Crown corporations.

We do not even know in any official way, Mr. Speaker, how many wholly-owned Crown corporations there are. The President of the Treasury Board has the responsibility for Crown corporations, and last evening I asked him how many corporations does the government own 100 per cent of. His answer was that he did not know, he could not tell us, he would try to count them.

Mr. Lalonde: He is out there counting now.

Mr. Beatty: Probably the most accurate guess which can be made is that the government probably has 170 wholly-owned Crown corporations at the present time. But that is only a guess; there is no way in which we can be sure. Not all Crown corporations are even listed in the schedules to the Financial Administration Act, a point made often by various groups looking at this particular issue. There is no way that this Parliament knows how many are wholly owned by the Government of Canada, and what does that say for the ability of members on any side to discharge their responsibility on behalf of their constituents? It says that we have been seriously weakened in our ability to protect the interests of Canadians, to protect the integrity of the taxpayers' dollars, and to do our job in representing our constituents on these matters of public concern.

The first thing this bill will do, Mr. Speaker, is to allow the creation of an unlimited number of new Crown corporations. That is something which apparently the President of the Treasury Board approves of. How will this be done? First of all, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources will go to three of his colleagues and ask them to sign an order in council. The signatures of four cabinet members will constitute the authorization for an order in council. That will give all the necessary authority for the minister to put the machinery into effect to create yet another and another new Crown corporation.

The next measure is a new one introduced by the minister in the new draft of the bill. That order in council will be tabled in Parliament and brought before us. Members of Parliament and Senators, whether it is 50 and 30, or 15 and 20, will have the ability to sign a negative resolution, put it before Parliament, and ask that a vote be held. This is the minister's token concession to parliamentary democracy. He sees this as the role of Parliament in controlling Crown corporations.

An hon. Member: Wonderful scheme.

Mr. Beatty: We will be allowed to put down a negative resolution and have a three-hour debate in the House of Commons. Assume for a minute, Mr. Speaker, that the minister wants to spend \$1 billion of the taxpayers' money to buy a new company and incorporate it as a Crown corporation. How would this be done? First of all, by an order in council giving him authority and by tabling the order in the House, and if members objected we would have three hours to debate the government's intention. This would be done without any legislation being put before us, without spelling out in any way what the mandate of the Crown corporation would be, without putting any limitations upon the authority of the government to act in this way. We would only have three hours to debate whether or not the taxpayers' money should be used in this way.

Assume, Mr. Speaker, that in those three hours a majority of members of the House raised concerns, convinced their colleagues and voted that this order should be nullified, that