

Financial Administration Act

In addition, Mr. Speaker, this Bill is about to be forced into committee. Government Members say that there has been enough parliamentary debate. Are they prepared to allow the public to appear in committee? The word that is being put out by the Treasury Board at the present time is that the Government intends, after it forces this Bill through the House, to prevent any outside witnesses from coming before the committee.

Members of this side of the House believe that the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Business Council on National Issues, the Consumers' Association of Canada and others not only have a right but perhaps a responsibility to appear before the committee and state their views. Yet what the Government wants is not only to gag Parliament but to gag the private sector as well and to prevent Canadians from presenting their points of view on this particular issue.

It looks like the Government is planning to spend one day in committee to discuss a Bill of this nature and scope. If anything ever pointed out how grievously flawed this Bill is and how little interest the Government has in allowing some parliamentary control over Crown corporations, it is the Government's attitude toward this Bill, the surreptitious nature of what it is trying to do behind the veil that it is putting in front of Parliament and its attempt to gag Parliament and block participation by the public in discussion of this Bill. Those things certainly indicate what the Government's attitude is toward control over Crown corporations.

At the end of this day, Mr. Speaker, when we are forced to vote on this Bill, Hon. Members on this side will oppose the Bill and will oppose it as strongly as we can. It is a bad Bill and a dangerous measure. The methods that have been used by the Government to force this Bill through the House and to prevent public and parliamentary debate on the legislation speak volumes about the Government's attitude. That should give every Canadian who believes that it is time to bring about some parliamentary control over Crown corporations and to ensure that the public's tax dollars are properly respected some cause for concern. At the end of this day, we will be voting to oppose this Bill and will be going to committee with the demand that private individuals and organizations from the private sector be permitted an opportunity to speak on this Bill, so that the Government will not simply be able to ram this Bill into law without proper scrutiny.

Mr. Geoff Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, it is with mixed feelings that I rise to speak to the subject matter of Bill C-24 today. The bad news, of course, is that I must speak under the circumstance of time allocation or, in not so diplomatic language, closure.

The Government is a past master at limiting debate on legislation it wants to push through the House no matter what the costs, or consequences to either the Canadian public or Parliament. I am given to understand that the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) wants this Bill pushed through the House before he retires in June. That is the reason for time allocation, Mr. Speaker. I suppose that after 16 years of

having Crown corporations multiplying like rabbits with many of them running amok without proper controls on their activities, the Prime Minister wishes to be noted in the history books as the one who sought to control the financial morass that he and his various Cabinets helped create.

It is with pleasure, however, that I rise to support the motion standing in the name of my colleague, the Hon. Member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie), which would provide that the Bill not be read a second time now but in six months hence; in effect, a six months' hoist. I support that recommendation for two very important reasons. The first is that the Bill as drafted is badly flawed. My colleagues from the Progressive Conservative Party have been pointing that out during the whole of second reading and there is no time for me to reiterate these concerns except to note that they are legitimate and very serious concerns that must be addressed by the Government before it tries to ram this legislation through the House.

Rising at this time, Mr. Speaker, also allows me to put clearly on the record my Party's views concerning the Canada Council and its relationship to Bill C-24. I have been supporting the six months' hoist of the present Bill because the Bill violates an important and long-standing principle which up until now all Parties in this House stood for and supported, the principle of having an arm's length relationship between the government of the day and its cultural agencies. This Bill violates that principle of independence from government, Mr. Speaker, by bringing the Canada Council under the authority of the Financial Administration Act. This is unprecedented and, in my opinion, insupportable.

The arm's length principle is based upon the belief that we should ensure that our cultural and artistic life be separate and distinct from our political life and that it should be free from political interference and control. The Massey Commission accepted this principle and recommended that the Canada Council be based upon the example of the Arts Council of Great Britain which has the state as patron but has an arm's length relationship with the government. The support and funding it receives is based upon artistic purposes and not political ones. This Bill blurs and distorts that principle.

It must be asked why it is necessary to introduce the Canada Council to a new structure for scrutiny and then spell out restrictions on interference. Clause 99(7) deals with this, Mr. Speaker. The question is why? I am sure we can all debate the reasons. The Canada Council itself understands the serious consequences of its being added to the FAA schedule and that is why it is speaking out so strongly against this Bill. It remembers only too well what happened in 1978 when the government of the day reduced the grant to the art bank by \$800,000.

The then Secretary of State who is now the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Roberts) was outraged that the Canada Council should assert its independence of what he felt its priorities should be. The Canada Council was doing what it had the right and legislative provision to do. It was acting independently of the Government in the manner in which it was set up to act.