

*Financial Administration Act*

to at least note that the Minister had offered to table the regulations before or when the Bill goes to committee.

One of the contentions that the Minister put forward in his remarks that is crucial in so far as Parliament is concerned is the role that Parliament should play in the control of Crown corporations. In his statement of March 15, the President of the Treasury Board said that Bill C-24 would clarify the roles and responsibilities of Parliament. This morning the Minister expounded at great length on how Parliament was going to control Crown corporations in the future.

● (1410)

Bill C-24 entails a clear and major erosion of parliament's existing control over Crown corporations. This is the latest manifestation of the Government's contempt and disregard for the House. The Minister's statement said that by statute Parliament will be required to approve the creation, mandate and financing of Crown corporations. But that is just nonsense, Mr. Speaker; it is not true at all.

Let us examine Parliament's control over the creation of Crown corporations. First of all, Parliament will have no control whatsoever over the creation of subsidiaries of Crown corporations. I contend that this has been the major cause of the problem. It has been the creation of subsidiaries of Crown corporations that has caused the greatest proliferation over the last 15 or 20 years. There are really only seven what may be called commercial Crown corporations but they have over 150 subsidiaries. They have bred like rabbits. Parliament does not have any control over the creation of these beasts at all. In effect, the Government is letting Parliament guard the front door of the stable while all the horses run out of a wide open back door.

Second, Bill C-24 says that a Minister does not need parliamentary approval for the creation of a Crown corporation if he or she already has the power to do so through an existing Act of Parliament. As Hon. Members know, there are any number of Acts of Parliament which give Ministers the right to create a parent Crown corporation. For example, under the energy resources legislation the Government could create a new Petro-Canada at will; under the Atomic Energy Control Act the Government could create any number of new parent Crown corporations. In the short time that we have had this Bill before us we have counted a dozen pieces of legislation that give Ministers such power. Parliament does not really have any control over the creation of Crown corporations; they can be created under the existing legislation. I hope the Government would consider an amendment that would preclude this. Surely that is not too much to ask.

Third, in a few instances a Minister might deem it appropriate to table a special Bill. This is very offensive, Mr. Speaker, and I say it is not in the spirit of parliamentary democracy. It is a flagrant, arrogant statement. If a Minister does table a special Bill to create a Crown corporation and Parliament is given the opportunity to review it, that review will be limited to 30 days in committee and seven hours of debate in the House, maximum. Is the Government kidding? Is this some

kind of practical joke? Does the Government really expect Members on this side to accept legislation that would limit our time to review something of the magnitude of the Petro-Canada Act or the Air Canada Act to 30 days in committee and seven hours of debate in the House? The Government is putting closure in the Act. I say that is arrogant and we will fight this Bill until the cows come home before we allow it. It is unprecedented; it is automatic legislative closure and is contrary to what I thought Parliament was all about.

Fourth, we have an opinion that suggests that Bill C-24 does not bind the Crown under Section 16 of the Interpretation Act and, therefore, does not remove the Governor in Council's current prerogative to incorporate new Crown corporations without parliamentary approval. In other words, the words in the Act and the words of the Minister belie any kind of parliamentary control of the creation of Crown corporations. The Minister should know that when any legislation is placed before the House, the first thing that is asked is whether it is meant to bind the Crown. That is the first question the draftsman will ask. In the case of Bill C-24 one has to ask why the Government chose to ignore that question. As we read it, the Bill gives the Governor in Council the prerogative to incorporate new Crown corporations at will, without parliamentary approval.

I want to return to the Minister's assertion that I referred to earlier, Mr. Speaker. Just how does Bill C-24 do anything that requires Parliament to approve the creation of every parent Crown corporation? Those are the Minister's words, not mine. He said that Parliament must approve the creation of every parent corporation. I have given four examples of ways the Government can escape that obligation. If it can escape the provision to come before Parliament, then I have to ask myself if there is any sincerity behind the legislation. It belies what the Minister has said.

The Minister went on to say quite a bit about the role of the board of directors. It will exercise greater control over Crown corporations. I am dismayed, but not surprised, to see that the Government has learned nothing from the fiascos at Canadair and de Havilland, from Atomic Energy of Canada Limited or Air Canada, from Polysar or the Cape Breton Development Corporation. The Government has chosen to ignore the recommendations of the Auditor General of Canada, the Lambert Commission and many of the Crown corporations themselves with respect to the role and responsibility of the boards of directors.

In effect, Bill C-24 would convert boards of directors into advisory boards with little or no power. If we are to come to grips with the control and accountability of Crown corporations, it is absolutely crucial to have ministerial accountability, not collective accountability. Everyone's responsibility is no one's responsibility, Mr. Speaker. The pillar of control and accountability must be ministerial accountability. You have to tie the can to someone and hold him accountable. That is a problem which occurred with Canadair, de Havilland and Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, as well as a number of other Crown corporations. No one assumed responsibility.