

Crown Corporations

not only because of the motion debated by the House earlier but because I was given to understand when I came here following a by-election in 1971 that this matter had been raised on a previous occasion by the hon. member.

I find myself completely opposed to the concept that members of parliament sit on boards that are related to government. I need only refer to a long and extensive commission that was conducted in the province of Ontario, known as the Camp commission, which inquired into what is presently occurring in the province of Ontario, namely, members sitting on given boards, and which recommended to that legislature the curtailment of such a practice. I think that was a good recommendation.

The hon. member in his sincere presentation today argued we ought to pass the motion because it is not like passing a bill. Should we pass the motion, what we would be saying is that this House gives its approval in principle to members of the House sitting on boards, and that is something I cannot go along with.

What power is there in a member of parliament sitting on a board? If the hon. member for Assiniboia were to sit on the board of directors of the Canadian National Railways, and that board were to decide to abandon a couple of hundred miles of railway branch line in Assiniboia constituency, I would be opposed to that. The CNR having given the economic reasons why this line should be abandoned, which I do not believe, I am still opposed to that proposal. When I put up my hand at the meeting in opposition, it is the only hand. So what power has a member of parliament in terms of curtailing the activities of that publicly-owned corporation?

Similarly, what power would one or two members of parliament sitting on a board have to curtail the expenditure of money? They can vocally attack such expenditure, which many of us do in standing committees and in the House, but on those boards they would be merely one other voice. The only way to control the operation of the public purse is for the House of Commons to control it either through this House as a committee of the whole or through the committee system. Certainly one or two members sitting on a board would be unable to curtail such activities.

To my mind, Mr. Speaker, this is tokenism. I raised this very subject this week. Questions can be asked about the kind of appointments made to the advisory board to the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce which handles millions of dollars of grants to corporations. There are questions to be asked about the kind of appointments to the board of directors of the Canada Development Corporation. There are questions to be asked about the kind of appointments made to the advisory board to the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. Representatives of large corporations which are already accumulating millions of dollars in the form of grants and loans from the federal treasury are sitting on advisory boards, which lays wide open the question of conflict of interest. To add to this ingredient members of parliament would, to my mind, be close to disastrous.

The second point I wish to make is this. I am sure this arose out of the last debate, but the question has been asked: Who makes these appointments to boards? For example, I am sure the hon. member for Skeena (Mr.

[Mr. Knight.]

Howard) would not be appointed to the Harbours Board responsible for Prince Rupert harbour because for a period of 20 years in this House of Commons he has fought, as did the member before him and others, for improvements to that port. We would never have appointments made involving members whom it is known for years have fought for changes to be made to meet the needs of the people of Canada. When it comes to the point of making such appointments the situation would lend itself to nothing but featherbedding.

● (1650)

We have had a situation in which several members have been annoyed about not being appointed parliamentary secretaries. We have the example of one good member who was dropped from the cabinet, the hon. member for Verdun (Mr. Mackasey). He should have been a member of the New Democratic Party a long time ago, but we have not succeeded in convincing him. What would they do with such a man in this situation? Perhaps they would appoint him to the board of Air Canada or to the board of the CNR.

An hon. Member: Or to the Unemployment Insurance Commission.

Mr. Knight: Perhaps he would be appointed to the Unemployment Insurance Commission. It would be nothing more than payola. The matter of payola to disgruntled members of parliament would become involved in this. For instance if the hon. member for Cochrane (Mr. Stewart) should not be happy with his position as chairman of a committee—or the hon. member for Assiniboia, if he should be a Liberal—he might be appointed to one of these boards. That possibility is left open. I am sure this kind of game is being played in the province of Ontario.

On the question of watching the expenditures of the taxpayers, on Tuesday evening we saw one of the greatest examples of stupidity by the representatives of the people of Canada. On that evening we passed \$17 billion in expenditures of the Canadian taxpayers' money. This was done in one evening. I suggest that a vast majority of those items were never scrutinized in the committee. I suggest that the whole operation of members of parliament attempting to consider estimates is ludicrous. If an hon. member for example wished to have an item cut from the budget of a given department, if for instance he moved to reduce the salary of a certain individual whom he felt had not been doing his job, or if he moved to curtail the car allowance of a cabinet minister, he could not do so because every time such a motion was moved the President of the Treasury Board would get up on the day on which we dealt with the estimates and move a motion of concurrence in the whole of the estimates.

Let us say that we wanted to curtail an expenditure in the amount of \$5 million for an airport and moved such a motion in a standing committee of this House. By the time the estimates had returned to the whole House we would not be able to cut out the item of \$5 million but would have to eliminate all the expenditures for all airports in the Dominion of Canada, which would involve perhaps \$172 million or \$285 million. It is absolute stupidity to allow such a system to continue.