

That does not require an Act of Parliament; it simply requires a change of attitude on behalf of government as to how it views and how it wants to make use of Crown corporations.

It is fine to have legislation. I do not think this is, by any means, perfect legislation. It is flawed in many ways and there have been many speakers who have pointed out why the legislation is flawed and why we are concerned about it. But even if it were first rate legislation that did not have the flaws, which we have tried to point out to the Government, the most important thing we could bring to any venture would be our attitude. I would like to suggest that that is one of the most important things which is lacking in this Government—the attitude which it takes toward its job. Its job is to see that the tax dollars which it collects from the many citizens of this country are spent in the best possible way.

I would like to talk about the regulations in the Bill. There is another point which needs to be made, and that is, that the more any government tries to do, the less control people have over it. If a government tried to do everything for the people, and they still had only one vote every four years by which to judge that government, that would mean that the people would have one vote to judge it on everything. The point is that the more a government attempts to do on behalf of the people of this country, the less control citizens of the country have over it, because they only have one vote on average every four years, or thereabouts, to pass judgment on everything the government does. Therefore, the more government does, the more that one vote at election time becomes diluted over all the issues with which the Government has dealt in the ensuing term. That is a concern. And when you see the amount of regulation being put in place with this Bill, which hands over the real power to Cabinet and by Order in Council, it further dilutes the control of the people, because it takes away what we should be doing in this House and in committee.

• (1650)

Over two years ago we began a process in this House which was designed to improve accountability, to improve the functioning of the House, and to improve the way the committee system works. I was part of that Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure which, I believe, in many ways, made some very useful suggestions as to how this place should conduct its affairs in a more appropriate and efficient fashion. Yet what did we see? We saw in many cases the recommendations of that committee thwarted by the present Government simply because of the attitude it took toward some of the changes which were recommended.

That is what is happening here, Mr. Speaker. When you have a committee of Cabinet which is able to appoint the board of directors, the chief executive officer, and in the case of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Canada Post, even appoint the vice-chairman of a Crown Corporation, what does that do to the accountability of that Crown corporation to the House of Commons? It does absolutely nothing.

It was pointed out previously by the Hon. Member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Clark) that one of the ways to control

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anything in this world is to have a handle on the financial matters. One of the ways to do that with Crown corporations is to regulate the amount of borrowing which they are able to do. Clause 100 in the Bill gives, at least on first blush, control of the borrowing power of any Crown corporation over to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde). However, Clause 135(4) states:

The Governor in Council may, on the recommendation of the Minister of Finance, make regulations

(a) exempting a specified Crown corporation or a Crown corporation of a specified class from the application of subsection (3)—

Subsection (3) simply says that a Crown Corporation cannot borrow unless the Minister of Finance approves. Yet the subsequent subsection dilutes the whole provision so that, with the approval of Cabinet, that Crown corporation can borrow and incur debt and carry on its affairs in spite of what appears to be a good clause, Clause 100, which would limit the amount of borrowing by any Crown corporation. Those are some of the things which are disconcerting about Bill C-24.

VIA Rail is an important institution in this country. It is important because the railways have played a historic role in the settlement of our country. Many of us from the west feel particularly strongly about it because distance is greater in the west, and when we see a Crown corporation like VIA Rail, which can operate without any mandate and incur the kinds of deficits it has without any instructions from the Government on what its mandate should be, it really makes one wonder how serious the Government is about addressing the problems of this Crown corporation without bringing forward, first of all, a VIA Rail Act.

It seems to me we can make the same case with CDIC. If the Government was really serious about doing what it should do with Crown corporations, it would, first of all, approach some of these Crown corporations and give them a mandate so that we may know how to judge them and what kind of guideposts they can be measured against. In the specific case of VIA Rail, we see that without a mandate it can abandon some of its passenger lines and then talk about bringing them back. How is this Bill going to affect VIA Rail when its executive officers ask for additional money to provide the services that we understand the Minister of Transport (Mr. Axworthy) is going to ask VIA Rail to provide? How is it going to be affected by this Bill? We are not told. We are simply turning over more regulation, more power and more latitude to the Cabinet to make regulations by Order in Council away from the House of Commons regarding the manner in which some of these Crown corporations should carry out their affairs.

I would like to suggest in closing, Mr. Speaker, being aware of the attitude of the present Government, that what this Bill is really going to do is to make Crown corporations if anything more exempt from examination by the House of Commons, more autonomous and independent of the committee system, and it will give them wider latitude in operating free of Parliament and free of the control of the ordinary citizens who vote and send us to this place to represent them.