

Appointments to Crown Corporations

● (5:00 p.m.)

CROWN CORPORATIONS**SUGGESTED APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT TO BOARDS OF DIRECTORS**

Mr. Ralph Stewart (Cochrane) moved:

that in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of introducing legislation to provide for the appointment of some elected Members of Parliament to the boards of directors of the various Crown corporations and other federal agencies so as to assure a better and more direct control of the legislative power over the executive power, to restore to Parliament part of its authority and to better utilize the various talents of the parliamentarians.

He said: Mr. Speaker, throughout society we notice a series of balances and counterbalances. I think the balance of power here and there in society is very necessary to the maintenance of our sociological system. Certainly, I feel that there is something lacking in the balance of power as far as the running of government business is concerned.

Who really runs the government? We can ask this question and those of us who are here reply to our constituents that on their behalf we come as elected representatives in their interest, to spend their money in the way that the majority of Canadians want it spent. Do we say that with tongue in cheek? When we get here we see that most government affairs are handled by thousands of civil servants who are encrusted in regulations. With the number of ministers we have in the cabinet, I wonder if we really have our finger on everything that is going on in government. Certainly, many ministers run their departments, there is no question about that, but there are others who allow themselves to be run by senior members of their department and there is no doubt about that either. In any case, civil servants certainly have a great deal to say in the running of government.

When we look at the agencies of government, or Crown corporations, these are even further removed from the power of Parliament than is the Civil Service, and from the influence of the people who elected us here. When a question is asked of a minister who answers in Parliament for a Crown corporation, he is obliged to say that he must respect the independence and autonomy of that organization and he passes along the remarks made. When the estimates of Crown corporations are examined in the various committees, what usually happens is that the Crown corporation appears and exposes its program to a

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

group of Members of Parliament who have relatively little research facilities and who know very little about the subject. The members of the committee ask questions in order to inform themselves of what is being done in a particular corporation, but they are not prepared to ask the kind of question that would probe into the day to day running of an organization. As a result, they get a little information, but are not in a position to dig deeper.

It is my contention, Mr. Speaker, that if we are sent here to look after the affairs of the country we should be expected to have a little more authority in those Crown corporations. The country expects us to ask questions that are meaningful and which probe into the expenses of those organizations. In the case of the CNR, the CBC or CMHC, we know very little about how the operations are run. I suggest that Members of Parliament have a right to serve on those boards. They should be present to act as a watchdog for the people. Is there any reason why they should not be there? Is a member of Parliament any less capable of serving on a board than those presently appointed? I suggest that the level of talent in this House is such that many members would be more than capable. For example, who on the board of directors of the CNR has any more intimate knowledge of railway operations than the hon. member for London East (Mr. Turner)? And who on the board of CMHC knows more about housing and urban matters than the hon. member for Trinity (Mr. Hellyer) or the hon. member for York West (Mr. Givens)? I say the talent in this House should be put to its best use, representing the people and looking after their affairs.

I have spoken and written on this subject on a number of occasions, Mr. Speaker. On one occasion my remarks were picked up by the Timmins *Daily Press* of February 12, 1969, the newspaper which serves most of my constituency. An editorial appeared under the title "Public Money—Keep Closer Watch". I should like to quote some of the remarks in this editorial. I certainly will not go through all of it because it deals with the various things I have done in my area and therefore is probably not too interesting to hon. members. However, one part that is pertinent reads as follows:

His most profound suggestion has got to be the parliamentary representation on Crown agencies.

He's probing into an area of administration that is worth millions to Canadian taxpayers. Just consider the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which