

*Financial Administration Act*

General refuses or retracts this statement about the Bill on the basis that there is some vast difference between the draft Bill that was shown to the Auditor General and the Bill that was tabled as Bill C-24 in the House, then let the Hon. Member place it before the House.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert):** I should point out that it is the Hon. Member's speech that is being questioned and upon which comments are being made. He should not be putting questions to another Hon. Member who is putting questions to him.

**Mr. Blenkarn:** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Parliamentary Secretary. Is it his view of government policy that the matter of the independence of the Auditor General ought to be brought before the House? My conversations with the Auditor General indicate that he did not expect any of his letters to be quoted in the House. Does the Parliamentary Secretary not believe that he has compromised the office of the Auditor General by quoting from his letter without allowing the Auditor General an opportunity to explain further? Is it the Government's intention to put the Auditor General out to dry? I want to tell the Parliamentary Secretary that I personally have had dinner with the Auditor General to discuss this matter. If the Government intends to continue to hang the Auditor General on a letter that he wrote approving the general thrust of the Government's proceeding with Crown corporation legislation and trying to say that the letter implied full approval of that legislation, he is totally wrong. If he continues this course of action and the Government continues in this way, it is hanging the Auditor General out to dry and destroying the office of the Auditor General.

**Mr. Evans:** Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is not being hung out to dry here any more than he is being hung out to dry when the attacks the Government in his report. The Auditor General has sent a letter that was neither private nor confidential. It was sent with carbon copies to others.

This does not happen to meet his political objectives, and if the Hon. Member is so concerned that the Auditor General is being hung out to dry, which he is not, then the Hon. Member can simply pass this Bill at second reading so that we can send it to committee. The Auditor General can then come and testify and say whether or not he approves of this Bill and its direction. The Auditor General might point out certain other action he might prefer. However, the Hon. Member must realize that the Auditor General is not the elected government of this country; we are.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert):** That is the end of the ten-minute period for questions and comments.

**Mr. Blenkarn:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Could we continue this line of questioning with the consent of the House?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert):** There must be unanimous consent.

**Some Hon. Members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert):** There is not unanimous consent. Continuing debate, the Hon. Member for Parry Sound-Muskoka (Mr. Darling).

**Mr. Stan Darling (Parry Sound-Muskoka):** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak on the second reading of Bill C-24, a proposal to amend the Financial Administration Act for Crown corporations.

The Government has pointed an accusing finger at the Opposition many times, charging us with trying to delay the legislative process. Bill C-24 serves as a prime example of proposed legislation that must be scuttled in the best interests of the Canadian people. As has too often been the case, this Bill is designed to take the power from Peter and give it to Paul.

It is the Government—which is not to be confused with Parliament—that will absorb that power through the Cabinet. Should this Bill pass, the board of directors of Crown corporations will be virtually relieved of their existing mandates.

The absence of regulation in the proposed Bill bestows an awesome power on the Government. This open-endedness and lack of upfront commitment is an insult to the parliamentary process. The potential for clandestine wheeling and dealing behind boardroom doors is fantastic. I believe that acceptance of this piece of legislation would set a deadly precedent whereby the Government would be no longer accountable to Parliament. The willingness of a government to create regulations to suit its needs for the moment is just part of an elaborate smokescreen. So long as it refuses to lay its cards on the table, it will be impossible to know exactly what it will do. For example, so long as the Treasury Board can exempt corporations from presenting operating and capital budgets at their whim and fancy, the temptation for cover-ups will be immense. That temptation should be removed. There is a vast difference between trying to remain flexible and throwing caution to the wind. It seems unfortunate that the Government failed to make changes where they are most required.

As is now the case, the Cabinet would retain the responsibility for making major decisions on behalf of Crown corporations. Instead of placing the onus on one Cabinet Minister or the board members themselves, the entire Cabinet shoulders the responsibility.

To echo what has already been said, being accountable to so many means that Crown corporations will continue to be accountable to no one. Why should the responsibility for a corporation's success or failure not rest on the shoulders of those who run them, namely the board of directors? Instead, Bill C-24 undermines their authority and cuts their legs out from underneath them.

What kind of work can we expect from capable men and women who are not trusted to use their own judgment and their own specialities? Surely the Government can efficiently monitor Crown corporations without tying the hands of the experts. If anything, an amendment of this nature should enhance and upgrade the responsibilities of the boards.