

Energy, Mines and Resources

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, my comments will be short. I listened with great attention to the various speeches which have been made on this bill. When I listened to some of the speeches I could not help wondering whether the speakers were talking about something quite different from the bill that is before the House.

The hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton) made references to democracy, and I appreciated the comments of the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Kristiansen) on accountability.

What this bill does is take a step forward in terms of the control by Parliament over Crown corporations. The hon. member for York-Peel (Mr. Stevens) complained about two corporations, Canadair and Consolidated Computer. I was tempted to remind him that those two companies have been the subject of government involvement without the opportunity for Parliament to debate the principle of those corporations at any time except when it came to debate the estimates of the various departments concerned.

If we look back over past practices by all governments since the beginning of the century, we find that governments have created Crown corporations by using the Canada Business Corporations Act and the acts which preceded it without any reference to Parliament. It was enough for a minister to get authorization from the cabinet to set up a company under the Canada Business Corporations Act, and that company was in operation. If public moneys were required, when estimates time came the matter was considered as an item in the estimates; but in many instances large numbers of Crown corporations in the past have been created by ministers resorting simply to the Canada Business Corporations Act.

What we are doing is giving Parliament two opportunities to look at any additional Crown corporations which might be created in the energy field and to debate those additional corporations and their activities. Rather, I should say there are three opportunities because there is also the bill now before the House asking Parliament for authorization to create those corporations.

Assuming this bill is approved by Parliament, what would happen? If at any time the government decided to create an additional energy corporation, there would be an opportunity for a debate in the House and in the Senate, if members of Parliament so wished, and a vote. In addition, if public moneys were required to make this corporation work and operate, that would be part of the estimates. The matter could be debated in the relevant committee and in both the House and the Senate.

While I understand the references made about the concept of democracy by the hon. member for Skeena, I argue that this bill indeed represents very significant progress from the previous situation and the previous practice. It would ensure several opportunities for both Houses of Parliament to have a say and to intervene when the government decides to create a Crown corporation in the energy field. In the past this has not been provided for and, as I indicated, one could go back and

find a large number of corporations which have been created under the Canada Business Corporations Act without Parliament's ever having an opportunity to debate the creation of such institutions.

I argue that this bill constitutes very significant progress from old and established practices which existed previously. Indeed, it brings more accountability of the government to Parliament and brings the democratic process into play more than ever before.

I agree with the hon. member for Skeena that we could have even more involvement. I suspect he found the answer himself when he said that what we need is rule changes in this House. I wholeheartedly agree with him, but this bill relates only to Crown Corporations in the energy field; it does not deal with the question of parliamentary reform. That question is the responsibility of other ministers and, I submit, involves the three parties in this House; but I would be one member of this House to speak very strongly in favour of parliamentary reform and more efficient rules.

I remind hon. members that when it came to creating Petro-Canada, I think it took over a year to get this House finally to pass the Petro-Canada bill. If I am not mistaken, we had to impose time allocation or closure to pass the bill because the Conservative opposition mounted a filibuster in relation to the creation of something which has proved to be of great value to this country. We came very close to losing that bill because it seemed as if it would never come out of the committee, and it could have disappeared through prorogation, the beginning of another session and so forth.

What we are doing with this bill is providing not less but more control to Parliament compared with previous practice. I urge my hon. friends to reflect upon this. We will have an opportunity to debate this issue further and to discuss it in detail in committee. I will be very happy to hear the views of my friends again in the committee and to discuss the matter, but I think it is important at this stage to stress that what we are doing with this bill is bringing more control to Parliament and not less as in the past.

● (1650)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): All those in favour will please say yea.

Some hon. Members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. Members: Nay.