

Crown Corporations

would obviously be an advantage. However, at the moment I do not consider that parliament as a whole would gain appreciably. One or two members might learn a lot about the operation of Atomic Energy of Canada or Polymer or C.N.R. or the National Capital Commission but I am not sure whether their contribution in the house would be greater than that made by those members of the cabinet who have responsibility for these organizations. And we all know that opportunity to discuss such matters, whether in committee or not, is limited.

I ask the hon. member this question. How does one guard against the involvement of a member of parliament sitting on a board of directors which is spending money and letting contracts in respect of which decisions have to be made by the board? Would the member of parliament have a vote in connection, say, with the letting of substantial contracts to some firm? And if he were involved to such an extent, would this be wise? Suppose some difficulty arose in a corporation—fortunately, we have been free from this and I hope we shall continue to be free from it—because of a mistake being made or because funds were misappropriated. If, following some quite innocent action or ignorance or inertia on his part, something went wrong with the affairs of the corporation, he might be very much embarrassed. I put this forward for the hon. member's consideration.

Mr. Walker: Is that a question?

Mr. Churchill: Would you like to answer it now?

Mr. Walker: Without closing the debate, may I simply say I think these are the very questions which might be discussed in detail in the committee if the subject of this resolution is sent to a committee for consideration. It might well be that an hon. member should not vote on such a board, that he should simply put forward his view. As I say, these are questions which it seems to me might best be put forward and answered in committee.

Mr. Churchill: That is why I am raising them, as a guide for committee study. I was interested in what the hon. member had to say in regard to the status of members of parliament, particularly the status of so-called backbenchers. This is often mentioned; people talk about raising the status of members of parliament. I confess that this is one problem which has never worried me. It

never bothered me when I first came to this house and sat against the curtains at the back, a position in the house which I found much more agreeable than any other place I have occupied because you are not under the same amount of observation and you can ease yourself out of the chamber without being noticed, whereas when you get to the first or second rows it is noticeable when you rise and leave.

I have never been bothered by this question of the status of a member of parliament. When I was a backbencher it did not bother me. I do not know why it should bother anybody. As all of us here know that it is a considerable achievement to get elected. Not only has a member of this house to be selected by the people in his area but he has to win a nominating convention, which is often more difficult than winning an election. After that he has to win an election. So it appears to me his status is fairly well established simply by belonging to this institution for which I have such a high regard.

● (6:40 p.m.)

It is not necessary to raise the status of members of the house by putting them on the boards of crown corporations. Status depends on the individual, on the contribution he makes here. A member who makes himself an expert in any field generally gets the ear of the House of Commons. In my experience it is up to the individual member to do the work, get the information and acquire the knowledge so that he is listened to by his colleagues in the house.

I am not at all certain that raising the status of a member of the house is one of the factors that should be considered in this otherwise interesting proposition. Status rests with the member himself. Members who are diligent in attendance and competent in their work acquire a status at least within their own party, though not necessarily in the eyes of the people who sit opposite them.

When a matter comes up in the house upon which a member is recognized as somewhat of an expert he is immediately called upon to represent his party and participate in the debate. I would not use the matter of status as an argument in connection with the motion before us. I have thrown out these suggestions as points that should be considered before the motion is pursued further. As I said in my opening remarks, if it is advisable to send the motion to a committee for further study then I see no great objection to