

Financial Administration Act

ment and hence to the public at large. Unfortunately, this Cabinet and other Liberal cabinets in the past have demonstrated a very definite inclination to ignore Parliament and to ignore public opinion. Whereas Cabinet responsibility under an older political system would have ensured parliamentary awareness of important and vital decisions, we do not have that kind of assurance any longer.

What we need is a system whereby the operations, the day-to-day administration and the books of Crown corporations worthy of public support, are open to public scrutiny. That means, of course, that they must be fully accountable to the Parliament of this land. It is not enough for summations of financial statistics to be made available to Parliament. Detailed estimates should be made available to the appropriate parliamentary committee. As well, we need the assurance that no new Crown corporation will be established without parliamentary scrutiny and without parliamentary approval. Hon. Members of this House know that it is possible under the proposed legislation for new subsidiaries to be created under existing legislation without reference to Parliament. Also, new Crown corporations could be created with only a minimum amount of reference to Parliament and, hence, to public opinion.

Therefore, there is nothing in this legislation which will dispel the immense amount of public antipathy which exists. There is nothing in the legislation which will reassure Canadians that someone is responsible to Parliament and hence to the public, that someone in fact is in charge of the ship. If we use the analogy of the rudderless ship, there is a feeling that somehow or other the whole concept of Crown corporations has gone astray from its original purpose.

Previous speakers have referred to Crown corporations which were introduced early in Canada's history, at a time when there was widespread appreciation of the need for such particular institutions. However, those Crown corporations were created in response to a specific need. They were created at a time when the purpose and the administration of those Crown corporations were subject to public scrutiny. Today, we have a situation whereby individuals operate in secret and have the capacity to create new Crown corporations that are permitted to continue to operate almost beyond public reproach. As a result, as has been stated, those Crown corporations were permitted to accumulate an operating deficit of approximately \$4 billion last year. As a result of the method in which those Crown corporations have been permitted to operate, without being subject to parliamentary and public scrutiny, we are virtually unaware of the reasons for those losses. The public remains unaware as to why the losses were incurred and in what enterprises they were incurred, and they have no awareness of the economic or perhaps social benefits which could be derived from such government activity.

One of the reasons why I think there is so much dissatisfaction with the entire political process today is that we have permitted an immense bureaucracy to evolve within Canada. I think that Crown corporations are part of that bureaucracy in a general sense. We permitted the public bureaucracy to

evolve within Canada and we permitted it to operate in such a way that the public, unfortunately, has lost confidence in it. As a result of the public's having lost confidence in that bureaucracy as well as in the Crown corporations, the public is growing extremely apprehensive about the entire parliamentary and political process. The danger in permitting that lack of confidence to continue is that, without support for this institution, the very essence of the democratic process is in danger. The essence of democracy is the principle of accountability. We must do everything to ensure that that principle continues.

Therefore, this Bill is a bad Bill because it misleads the public into believing that henceforth, if the Bill is passed, it would ensure that accountability. This Bill does not go far enough. It is bad legislation and must be amended before it can be improved.

Mr. Charles Mayer (Portage-Marquette): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-24 is indeed an important piece of legislation. It is important in the context of the tremendous number of Crown corporations in Canada. In fact, I am given to understand that the Government does not know precisely how many Crown corporations it has. If the Government does not know how many Crown corporations it has, then it becomes all the more important that the legislation be effective to deal with their operation.

I listened with interest to the Hon. Member for Northumberland (Mr. Hees) who spoke previously. He is a very distinguished and senior Member of this House. He referred to information being relative, accurate and too late. It reminds me of the story of the economist who was good in handing out information that was relative, accurate, but totally useless. That is how many of us view the legislation in front of us. It is not simply that we want to be critical of the Government for the sake of being critical, but many speakers, on this side, in fact the spokesman for our Party, the Hon. Member for Calgary South (Mr. Thomson), laid out some very useful and helpful suggestions on ways in which the Government could use legislation like this effectively to bring about its intended purpose.

The name "Crown corporation" has an interesting connotation. The Bill begins by saying:

Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons—

I am not sure that Her Majesty, if she knew everything that was being carried out in her name, would be very pleased about it. One cannot help but make that kind of observation. What is most important for anyone, including government, to bring to his job is the right attitude. If the Government really wanted to control Crown corporations and to see that they function according to their purpose, it would have had a different attitude. I would like to cite VIA Rail as an example. VIA Rail was created on a \$1 vote. We do not have a Bill which is called, "VIA Rail". Therefore, there is no precise, easy-to-look-at terms of reference for VIA Rail. What is VIA Rail's mandate? In the last Estimates we saw that it is costing the taxpayers of this country \$700 million or \$800 million.