

Financial Administration Act

corporations published by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Gray), you will not find any common denominator as to what is and what is not a Crown corporation. There are Crown corporations that involve the last post fund to Petro-Canada, to subsidiaries of Petro-Canada, to Air Canada and so on. One of the first things we need to know is what is a Crown corporation. The Crown corporations in which Members of Parliament are most interested at this point are those that intervene in some way in the economic affairs of our country.

The second question that has to be looked at in such a committee is the impact of Crown corporations in monopoly situations, such as Northern Power Commission, Northern Transportation, and Air Canada, CP Air policy, and the Petro-Canada situation with respect to the other oil companies. We have to examine the role that these companies play where there is a competitive factor. Then we have to look at Crown corporations from the point of view of where we have a monopoly operation. Canadair and Air Canada are classic examples. We also have to provide some guidelines as to the risk that we ought to take in our Crown corporations. When you go into business, establish a new corporation or buy someone else out, you take on some very real risks. Nobody can foretell the future. It means that each Crown corporation is up against its own form of risk.

We do not debate those issues in the House of Commons, mainly because we do not provide ourselves the time to do it. We in this place probably manage our time in the most incompetent way of any legislature in the world. If Members are interested in these very real points of policy, then we have to provide time to debate them. In addition, we have to find a mechanism which would force us to pay attention to the facts or the problem in front of us, instead of wandering all over the map, as we do now.

This is why I suggest that we set up a special committee to examine the question of Crown corporations. This should be examined from the three points of view I have mentioned. The committee should spend some time trying to develop guidelines it expects the Government to follow in terms of the creation of Crown corporations in the future. Also, when it examines Crown corporations, there should be guidelines for this examination both on the floor of the House and in committee. If we were able to agree on a platform and pay attention to that when we come back after the next sequence of elections, we would have served everybody very well and this debate might have been of some use after all, after having gone through 79 speeches.

Mr. Gordon Taylor (Bow River): Mr. Speaker, isn't it wonderful that a Member of the Government finally got up to defend its legislation? A Member on the Government side has finally had the courage to stand up and support this government legislation. That is wonderful, just wonderful! If the Hon. Member has such a wonderful suggestion, why does he not persuade his colleagues to bring in the amendment so that we can look at it?

• (1650)

Members of both opposition Parties have been talking about accountability and responsibility. That is what we want for our corporations. We are not saying that all corporations are bad, because they are not all bad, some are good. However, There should be accountability. The people should have the opportunity to know what these Crown corporations are doing rather than going on year after year with no one, not even the Ministers, knowing what they are doing.

I would like to deal with some important points regarding this Bill. I shall begin by reading six points contained in a letter which I think must be noted very carefully. They are:

1. First and foremost, a statute overrules any Standing Order. This, in my judgment, means that the House should take a very hard look at any Bill which would have this effect, and should pass it only if very solid proof is advanced that such a provision is essential for some indispensable public purpose.

It would take a great deal to convince me that any such provisions are ever required. I suppose it is conceivable that, in a great war, or something of that sort, they might be justifiable; but, plainly, no such situation is involved here, at least as far as I can see.

I think the Opposition should raise Cain on this.

2. Specifically, section 2.2(3) is almost incredible. Surely, never before has any statute invaded the rights and privileges of the House of Commons by providing for a committee and then forbidding a motion to concur in its report. This is plainly a matter for the House itself to decide. If it wants to forbid motions for concurrence, it can of course do so. And, even if it does not, a motion for concurrence is not obligatory. If no one wants to move it, all right. But to forbid a motion for concurrence is an emasculation of the rights, powers and privileges of the House of Commons.

The Government should be made to stand and deliver on this. It is, on the face of it, a most gross invasion of the rights, powers and privileges of the House.

Heaven knows the House has little enough power now. But this, "Hang your clothes on a hickory limb, But don't go near the water," is intolerable. What possible excuse can there be for this?

3. Passage of this provision could provide the Executive with a very dangerous precedent. It could try the same game again, forbidding motions to concur in the reports of other committees, and pleading, in justification, "Well, you accepted it in Bill C-24".

4. What justification can be offered for section 154(4)? The powers of the Joint Committee on Regulations and Other Statutory Instruments are already feeble enough. There are too many exemptions, and too slipperily worded, now. Why add to them? Why add to the secrecy which the freedom of information legislation was supposed to help us escape from?

5. There is one piece of very sloppy drafting: section 155(3), which speaks of a "committee of Parliament". There is no such animal. There are Committees of the House of Commons; there are Committees of the Senate; there are Joint Committees of both Houses. But Parliament consists of the Queen, the Senate and the House of Commons... How can you have a Committee of the Queen?

6. Section 155 provides that the motion contemplated shall stand referred to such committee as either House (or both) may designate. As I read it, this means it must go to a committee. But the committee is allowed only thirty days to consider and report. If it has not finished its job in thirty days, the Government can then move the motion to authorize the transaction under section 100, and this must be disposed of after only seven hours' uninterrupted debate.

This is another limitation on the powers of committees.

The Government should be pressed to justify it, pressed very hard.

"For ways that are dark and tricks that are strange—"

The six points which I have just put on the record were contained in a letter from Eugene Forsey, a former Senator and a man learned in the law. That is what he thinks about Bill C-24. I thought it was very important that that be put on