

Financial Administration Act

With respect to the comments which have been made regarding committees needing more power to examine Crown corporations, I quite agree. In my opinion, one of the great weaknesses of the parliamentary system is the lack of power and the lack of independence of committees. The Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure made some recommendations in that direction. If the Government had been serious about parliamentary reform and about greater accountability, it could have seized that opportunity and implemented those recommendations. That would have gone some way toward increasing accountability. But we did not see that kind of movement on the part of the Government.

The reforms that were in the last package of parliamentary reform have not succeeded in increasing accountability. To simply have annual reports of Crown corporations referred to committee without any change in the independence of those committees, without any significant increase in the power of those committees and, finally, without any change in the whole way in which committees are dominated by Party discipline, is to have in the final analysis no improvements in accountability at all. Those are the areas that we have to look to if we are really interested in accountability.

I would like to address some of the points raised by my Conservative colleagues regarding accountability, as they have a lot to say about it. I am going to take it for granted that when it comes to accountability in Crown corporations, or for that matter accountability period, the Liberal Party and the Liberal Government are beyond redemption in this respect. They have given government such a bad name, and given Crown corporations such a bad name, that it has made life difficult for those of us in the New Democratic Party who believe that Crown corporations can be used as a positive and efficient instrument for the social and economic well-being of the country.

I would like to look at the Tory position for a moment. There seem to be a couple of contradictions in that position. On the one hand, the Tories want to argue that Crown corporations ought to act in a truly economic way—that is, in the narrow sense of the word “economic”—and that there ought to be no political dimension to economic activities; that economic activities abide by certain laws which are outside the realm of political and social consideration. I would ask the Tories how they intend to reconcile this view of economic activity which they traditionally have with the injection of the political dimension, *vis-à-vis* more accountability, into the running of Crown corporations? Either they should admit that they are wrong about what constitutes economic activity and about the narrow view of economic activity which they have, or they should admit that they are trying to set up a process whereby biased scrutiny, rather than accountability in the best spirit of the word, is made possible. In other words, they want accountability not to increase the effectiveness of Crown corporations, but so that they can have more forums for attacking Crown corporations on principle as an instrument of social and economic policy. I invite my Conservative colleagues to address that question.

I would like to comment on the speech of the Hon. Member for Crowfoot (Mr. Malone). He spoke about taxation without representation. He spoke about taxpayers' money being spent without any accountability. If we want to talk about accountability, we must be consistent. We want accountability of all money that is spent that belongs to taxpayers. My problem with the Conservative Party is that it wants accountability for all the money which is being spent by Crown corporations, but it does not want accountability for the money which is being spent by private corporations in the form of tax incentives and tax expenditures. Billions of dollars are given to the oil companies and the Conservative Party says: “Just let them have the money and they will do what they want with it. We trust their judgment. We do not want any accountability there”. They do not say: “Make the CPR accountable for the decisions which it makes with respect to the well-being of the country”.

The NDP is at least being consistent when it talks about accountability. We want all of the major economic actors in the country to be accountable to the public good, not just the Crown corporations while leaving the multinationals to do as they please. That is the Conservative position. Why do we not see consistency in the Conservative Party when it comes to accountability? Why do they never rise to criticize the multinational corporations? We in the NDP do not make any distinction. If Petro-Canada does something which we believe is wrong, we rise and say so. If the CNR does something which we believe is wrong, we rise and say so. The NDP is not intimidated by ideology in this respect. We think that everyone should be made accountable. But the Conservatives never get up and criticize the multinationals or the private sector in this respect.

When the day comes that the Progressive Conservative Party stands up and demands comprehensive accountability for economic decisions of major significance which are taken in this country, then we will know that it is serious about accountability and is not just grinding its usual ideological axe when it comes to public ownership.

The question of accountability, as I have stated, is one with which all Members ought to be concerned. I know that the public is concerned with it. People have a sense, as was said earlier, that there is a kind of sub-layer of government. It is something which we must address as a Parliament if we want Parliament to continue to be perceived as performing its traditional role of holding the government accountable for its expenditures. We will not get there by having one-sided views of accountability such as was put forward by the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, or ideas of no accountability, which is what the Liberals have been about for so many years. We will only get it when we get people who are interested in comprehensive accountability.

Mr. Don Blenkarn (Mississauga South): Mr. Speaker, the only problem the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie) has with the Conservative Party is that the Conservative Party will make sure that he does not return to this House after the next election. In speaking to accountability, he would