

Northern Canada Power Commission Act

Mr. Nielsen: May I ask the hon. member a question?

Mr. Thomson: Yes.

Mr. Nielsen: Would it not be a fairer application of the principle to say that the kind of equalization to which the hon. member is referring should come out of the common tax dollar? After all, all Canadians are taxed at the same rate. The hon. member is suggesting that an additional burden be placed on the citizens of Whitehorse in the matter of consumer rates for electricity. I suggest that the common tax dollar should be the consideration, and with that principle I would agree.

• (4:40 p.m.)

Mr. Thomson: Mr. Speaker, I would not agree completely with the hon. member. I think we in Canada have made some attempt at least to provide equity on the tax dollar basis.

Let us go back to the consideration of power. What we have been referring to is a form of tax, and I agree this will cost the people of Whitehorse more. I am sure the hon. member who represents Whitehorse wants his area of the north developed and hopes that it will one day become a province. That is also my hope. It seems to me that the areas which are developed already and which have some natural advantages should be willing to contribute to areas which have not. If, for example, the people of Whitehorse service the needs of people in adjacent areas, those who live in small or rural communities, they benefit because these people are carrying on mining and trapping. Why should they not contribute something? I have argued this point in respect of Saskatchewan.

I agree that the problems of the Yukon are somewhat different since the population is more scattered and the centres are smaller; it would be more difficult to put in a good system. But I think the principle is the same. The hon. member suggests there are inefficiencies in this Crown corporation, if this is the right term. I will not argue with him in that regard. There should not be any inefficiency.

Having regard to the total picture and the principle, I think the people of large centres, whether they be in Toronto as compared with the rural areas of Ontario, in Regina as compared with the rural areas of Saskatchewan, or in the Yukon, should display a sense of reasonableness. We cannot all live in Toronto, Regina or Whitehorse. Let us accept the fact that there are people on the fringes of these large areas who want power, and that the only way they can get it is through an extension of the services from larger centres. This is a reasonable and rational approach.

From my experience, the small communities have little one horse putt-putts to generate power. Very often they only run them on Mondays so that people can do their washing, and for several hours at night. In the larger towns they have a reasonable source of power but no real commercial supply. Individual farmers have their own electricity plants. I am sure this is the case in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. These areas have this type of power supply and, logically, this will be the

[Mr. Thomson.]

situation for some time. In the future we must look for a better system. We must consider an over-all system to provide power in bulk on an economically sound basis and at a cheap, efficient rate that everybody can afford.

I consider electrical power as a building block in the development of any economy. I have had the opportunity of visiting a number of electrical power-producing plants in Canada. I was at an atomic energy plant in Quebec in October. I visited one in Pickering before Christmas, and I visited the Portage dam in British Columbia. I also visited the Squaw Rapids dam and the South Saskatchewan River dam, not to mention several other steam-generating plants using coal or natural gas. It seems obvious to me that without power a country will go nowhere, but with a cheap, efficient and secure source of power we will develop business and industry to serve the people well in the outlying areas as well as Canada as a whole.

With specific reference to the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, I think a Crown corporation in charge of power should insist that businesses pay a fair price for energy. Businesses should contribute to the well-being of the people in their areas. Perhaps they should contribute to an even greater extent in relation to the power they consume, because of the security of their power needs.

As I indicated earlier, I believe that the Yukon and Northwest Territories will eventually become provinces. I am certain this will be the case in respect of the Yukon. There should be some kind of equalization of costs in respect of power, roads and other development features. This is the logical approach, and I agree with the hon. member for Yukon when he talks about equalization within these two areas. The hon. member may have a point when he refers to the comparative cost of power in the Yukon and in Frobisher Bay. Perhaps there is a logical reason for this difference.

If I understood the Parliamentary Secretary correctly, this equalization is to be conducted on a regional basis. Perhaps he would tell the House whether it is the intention of the government to equate these different costs. Is the cost of power in Frobisher Bay to be at the same rate as power produced at Whitehorse?

I have not visited the Yukon but I have been in the Northwest Territories, northern Alberta, northern Saskatchewan and northern B.C. I envisage a great future for these areas if we have patience and a willingness to invest our wealth. It seems to me that one of the best things we can do is make certain there are adequate sources of power for people who move in to develop these areas. In this way we can help them avoid additional development costs.

We should, logically, look toward a larger power service and a grid system such as exists in other sections of the country. This may be a long time coming for areas such as the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, but I think we should look for something of this nature in the north. For this reason, we hope the government will extend services to supply power—hopefully, ahead of business—while at the same time encouraging business to take advantage of such an energy supply.