

● (1550)

The suggestion I would make to the minister in connection with a crisis or an emergency, as he describes it, is that when such a situation does arise which requires a meeting to be held without notice to the members of the commission, then a subsequent meeting should be held to ratify the decisions made by the commission at the meeting of which notice was not given. That is the simple answer to that matter, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Buchanan: Mr. Speaker, I think the 24 hours or something of that order would qualify in the manner suggested by the hon. member. If he would like to direct his mind to that perhaps we could stand this and move to the following motion.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, subject to what my colleague from the Northwest Territories has to say, I am quite happy to have my amendment amended, and I cannot do it myself but perhaps my colleague might, by deleting the words "four days" and substituting therefor "24 hours".

Mr. Wally Firth (Northwest Territories): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few comments on this amendment now before us. The power commission bill has been before the committee almost all winter and a lot of time has been spent on it, with a great deal of representation being made. Generally the idea, or the intent of the amendment put forward by the hon. member for the Yukon (Mr. Nielson) is good, but, like some aspects of the bill itself, I do not believe it goes far enough.

Keeping that in mind, I would not like to add any more restrictions or make the procedure more cumbersome by putting in regulations such as contained in this amendment. I think it would all depend on the individuals who are members of the commission. I can assure you that the people of the north who may be appointed would not stand for meetings being held without them being present, and you would hear their complaints loud and clear.

Mr. Nielsen: Supposing they were not notified?

Mr. Firth: I think this difficulty can be overcome by setting regular dates for meetings, perhaps the first Monday of every month, so that the date for meetings will be known. The regular meetings could be held at regular places. In addition, I think the amendment would be restrictive in the case of an emergency. Therefore I do not really believe we need this provision. I think it is just plain common sense and good practice to have members notified in time, and certainly the time of meetings would be known if they were held on a regular basis. With improved communications in the north you can get in touch with people within 24 hours. Personally I would not like to see too many restrictions, and for that reason I am not in favour of the amendment.

Hon. Alvin Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might speak to the amendment proposed by the hon. member for the Yukon (Mr. Nielsen), and my remarks are in response to what the hon. member for the Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth) has said.

As some members of the House may know, my family connections with the Yukon go back over 70 years, and I

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do have some awareness of the feelings of the people up there in respect of this type of sensitive issue. The sensitivity exists in that no matter what you do in respect of appointing a commission to represent the federal government in the territories, the people there still look at the members as hired men of the minister and of the government here. Whenever you have a situation in which it is possible that they are not invited they will assume they were not invited because they did not belong to that inner group the commission wanted attending the meeting. I think the minister would be well advised to give favourable consideration, as I know he has done, to this amendment proposed by the hon. member for the Yukon. This involves not only the matter of being above suspicion, but also of appearing to be above suspicion.

Knowing the sensitivity of northerners in respect of anything we do down here, there is always the assumption that it is a diminution or restriction by the federal government of their desire to have provincial status, I would not like to see more fuel added to the fire. I think we should avoid that. We can do so by a simple amendment that repeats what was in the original act, that a quorum should be so and so. I think we should put in what a quorum should consist of, and that there should be 24 hours notice. I do not think this would delay the calling of any emergency meeting.

I would conclude by stating that the election in Alberta today is being fought on a very similar issue. It goes back to the time the parliament of Canada in 1905 ratified the decision to establish the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan without giving the people there control over their resources. As a result we have alienation in these two provinces to this day. This would not have been the case if the parliament in 1905 had considered the people who lived in Alberta and Saskatchewan. The situation then is somewhat comparable to the situation that exists today in the north.

I just remind hon. members of this political fact when suggesting that we should not add fuel to the situation that already exists. These people have spent many years in the north waiting for development and the opportunity to form their own provincial government so they can administer their own resources, and the minister must be very careful. I would suggest that any amendment that takes away the suspicion in the minds of northerners that they are being dominated by the government here in Ottawa, or by the minister, would be a helpful amendment. Even though parliament can come back 25 or 30 years later and correct its mistakes, let us not make the mistakes in the first place if we can avoid doing so by a simple amendment now.

I think the minister's response to the hon. member is the correct one. I do not quarrel with the views of the hon. member for the Northwest Territories if you have the ordinary situation, but we are not dealing with the ordinary situation in the north. These people are as sensitive as cats at a certain season of the year, and you have to keep this fact in mind. I think the minister would save a lot of trouble for himself if he took measures now to prevent an inflammatory situation arising, or a situation that I know is always ready to be inflamed.