

In 1954 when I was a member of the legislature in Newfoundland it gave me great pleasure to support a bill to establish the Newfoundland power commission. This power commission was set up with a commissioner but nothing was done. He had the power to investigate existing and potential developments for generating electrical power and energy from water power, coal, peat, gas, oil or any other source and for transmitting such power and energy with a view to supplying electrical energy and power wherever needed throughout the province and increasing where necessary the existing supply. Toward that end the commission has power to undertake research and investigations of any kind that may be necessary.

The lieutenant governor in council may, upon the report of the commission recommending the same, authorize the commission—this is an interesting point, Mr. Speaker, because the first thing which they have power to recommend is—"to contract with any person generating, transmitting or distributing electrical power or energy, or proposing to do so, for the supply of electrical power or energy to any part of Newfoundland, and agree to pay to such person such part of the cost of the supply or such other subsidy or remuneration as the lieutenant governor in council may approve". The very first thing that is set out in the powers of the commission, after the commission has investigated the situation, is that the lieutenant governor in council may authorize the commission to purchase power and then distribute it. It seems to me that is the most essential thing they can do with a set-up such as ours.

The hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate must be familiar with the recent history of government-owned businesses in Newfoundland. I am quite sure he will recognize there is a certain amount of risk in the provincial government going into business on its own. I am wondering if it would not be preferable for the government of Newfoundland to adopt a policy of purchasing the electricity from some private company, instead of the commission developing electricity by constructing plants of its own.

Mr. Pickersgill: Surely the minister would admit that is a matter for the government of Newfoundland to decide?

Mr. Browne (St. John's West): Of course it is a matter for the government of Newfoundland to decide. That is what the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources (Mr. Hamilton) and other members of the government have said. It is a matter for the government. What do they want to do? We do not know until they tell us.

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Mr. Pickersgill: If the minister would not mind, I should like to ask one more question. Did not the government of Newfoundland ask the government of which he is a member to make a very small amendment to this enabling legislation so that they could make that choice and be assured of help, and did the government of which the hon. gentleman is a member not refuse to do that?

Mr. Browne (St. John's West): Mr. Speaker, a copy of a message purporting to go from the premier of Newfoundland to the Prime Minister was sent to me by the premier of Newfoundland, in which it was requested that the word "hydro" be added to the bill. But it seems to me, knowing the situation in Newfoundland as well as I do, or as I think I do at any rate, the thing needed in Newfoundland at the present time is an extension of the power lines and that could be done most easily.

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Speaker, I am rising in the most inoffensive way I can on a point of privilege.

Mr. Browne (St. John's West): The hon. gentleman is always inoffensive.

Mr. Pickersgill: I thank the hon. gentleman. The hon. member used the word "purporting". Surely he is not suggesting that the message which the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) tabled in this house from the premier of Newfoundland only purported to come from him?

Mr. Browne (St. John's West): I did not see that message which the Prime Minister tabled in this house.

Mr. Pickersgill: The Prime Minister did not bring it before the cabinet?

Mr. Browne (St. John's West): I did not see the message. I do not know if it went to the cabinet. I am referring to the one which I received. Perhaps the hon. member will appreciate that there are only six minutes left, and no doubt he intends to speak himself, so perhaps I might continue.

Some hon. Members: Oh, no.

Mr. Browne (St. John's West): The thing that is necessary above everything else in Newfoundland at the present time is just the very thing that this bill provides for Newfoundland, namely the right to apply to the federal government to finance the construction of transmission lines. By this means electricity can be brought in a short time to thousands of people. On the other hand, if the government is going to go into the business of supplying electricity,