

Northern Canada Power Commission

will develop some options for involving companies or individuals in the provision of electricity in the Northwest Territories. That may involve, for example, a private utility taking an equity position at some future time. The Government of the Northwest Territories wants to determine whether the private sector could finance, develop and own future electrical projects in the Northwest Territories. Once again, that will be their decision, just as the decision was taken in the Yukon to involve the private sector.

The Yukon did it in a slightly different way. It was not an equity position. It was not development or ownership. In fact, the Yukon Government decided that the best approach was to combine on the one hand public sector ownership and, on the other, to have efficient and effective management from the private sector. What they did was to negotiate a management contract with the private sector and, to the best of my knowledge, that arrangement is working well.

The agreement in principle noted that after the transfer the electrical utility operations will be subject to regulation by a regulatory agency appointed by the Government of the Northwest Territories. However, the background notes from the department say that the N.W.T. Power Commission will eventually, after a transition period, be regulated by the N.W.T. Public Utility Board. I must express to the Minister and the House a modest degree of concern about this eventuality. I believe that the regulatory powers should be in the hands of the N.W.T. Public Utility Board as quickly as possible.

I want to say that we in the Official Opposition support the Bill. I certainly want to commend the Minister for carrying forward recommendations from a parliamentary committee even though the work was done in a previous Parliament. I just want to make reference again to committees in case it is missed along the way because I always take pride in the way in which parliamentary committees can contribute to the process of Government. I think there is too little of that in our system. Our parliamentary committees could do so much to give us better Government. Often, what they recommend is put aside, and I sometimes wonder why. I often feel that there is some jealousy on the part of official policy makers, some feeling that parliamentarians are out of their league in the formulation of public policy. Not at all. We have here a case in point.

It was a subcommittee of the standing parliamentary committee on northern affairs that in 1981 recommended that complete federal devolution to territorial Crown corporations be accepted quickly, along with forgiveness of federal debt, and the commencement of a process of discussion by the territorial Governments involving private utilities as well as the NCPC. This recommendation reflected the findings of the subcommittee that the federal Government's powers, decision-making and budgetary processes, do not make the NCPC fully accountable to the people it serves, and that the territorial Governments have almost no legislative and regulatory jurisdiction over NCPC.

Over the last few days I checked with the Government of the Northwest Territories, its Minister of Energy, and her officials, and they tell me that they have examined the Bill and they find it fully acceptable and in keeping with the agreement in principle to which I have been referring. Therefore, my concerns are modest in nature.

I really want to know how long the Minister thinks it is going to take before the headquarters are transferred from Edmonton, and where those particular assets will go. I wonder why there should be a delay in transferring regulation to the Northwest Territories Public Utility Board.

I cannot help but note as well that the recommendation of the subcommittee that there be a full write-off of the debt was not accepted. However, I must assume there was some hard bargaining in the negotiations between the Government of the Northwest Territories and the federal Government, and that the Government of the Northwest Territories got the best possible deal consistent with the realities that we here in Ottawa face with a consistently and persistently high federal deficit.

I want to commend the Government of the Northwest Territories for its abiding concern for its employees. I wish them well as they take another step in the direction of devolution of full responsible Government. As this process continues, I do have a lingering question about the future role of the Department of Northern Development with its approximately 800 person-years. When the Minister meets the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development with his Estimates, I want to probe further as to why this Department is not being wound down in the interests of expenditure reduction. It is becoming more and more puzzling to myself and other members of the committee what exactly is the role of the Department of Northern Development now that so much devolution has taken place and now that so many other departments are active in the North, including the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, the Department of the Environment, and so on.

I cannot conclude without once again expressing the hope—although I have to believe it is probably futile to do so—that somehow the Meech Lake Accord could be amended to deal with the concerns of the North, our Canadian citizens who live in the Yukon and Northwest Territories. However, in raising these additional concerns I wish in no way to detract from the progress we are making in this House today in the interests of Canada's North. What we are doing today is a good move. It is a welcome step. It is a positive development.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Madam Speaker, I, too, am pleased to rise and make a few comments on this Bill and, on behalf of my Party, to say that in essence we support the Bill and the transfer of the Northern Canada Power Commission to the Northwest Territories. As a Member for the Yukon I am particularly interested in what this kind of transfer represents to northerners. As was mentioned by other speakers