

*Beechwood Power Project Loan*

reading to approve the principle of this bill, what, in the opinion of the government the principle of the bill really is. By a series of questions to which I was quite unable to get any answers at the committee stage preceding the bill I endeavoured to find out what was the principle on which this bill was based, in the opinion of the government. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that in answer to a series of questions which I put on the order paper the Prime Minister gave certain replies on November 22 to be found in *Hansard* on page 1405. The first of these questions was:

Are loans based on the principle applied to the Beechwood project to be available only for projects in the Atlantic provinces?

The answer the Prime Minister gave to that question was: no. Therefore, I think we can reasonably assume that the principle of this bill is not simply the extension of a loan in an isolated case without relation to anything else anywhere in Canada, with the exception of this particular project. This is a policy which the Prime Minister said was not limited even to the Atlantic provinces. Then I asked a second question, and my second question was:

If not, will all provinces qualify?

The answer of the Prime Minister to this question was:

The answer is that any province that has a project for which there is an equally good case could qualify in respect of that project.

That would seem to suggest that loans of this character based on this principle could be applied to projects in any province in any part of Canada, and it does seem to me that it would be most helpful to the house and to all hon. members who have to answer for their votes here to their constituents should know what the phrase "equally good projects" really means.

And as I see the hon. member for Saint John-Albert (Mr. Bell) following my observations intently, I am going to repeat what I said on the resolution stage so that there may be no misunderstanding about this matter. I am quite convinced by what the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fleming) has said—and I am not often convinced by what the Minister of Finance says—that it would be difficult for the government of the province of New Brunswick to refund—and I use the word "refund" in the ordinary dictionary sense—the moneys which that province has expended on this project which is now, we are told, almost complete, or which will be complete before the loan is taken out. As I say, I believe the minister is right when he says that it would be a difficult thing for the government of New Brunswick to do, and I do think in all the

circumstances, it is certainly in the national interest to maintain the credit of all the provinces of Canada. I believe it should be done at a time when there seems to be universal agreement everywhere in the house that much more needs to be done than has been done up to now to bring the economic level of the Atlantic provinces to a level comparable with the rest of the country.

I should not even for a moment consider opposing this loan in the circumstances, even if it were an isolated instance, but I would be much readier to support this bill if I knew exactly what I was supporting in addition to Beechwood and so, I think, would almost every other hon. member from any of the other nine provinces, except New Brunswick. The Prime Minister has told us that the principle of this legislation applies across the country, that it applies in every province which can make out an equally good case. I am sure the government could get almost universal and even, perhaps, enthusiastic support for this legislation if it would tell us what it really involves. What are the next stages?

The Minister of Finance, in answer to a question I asked at the resolution stage the other day—the question was: "is this Beechwood proposal the first stage of the national development program"—answered: yes. It was a categorical affirmative. In other words, we have been told that this project is a part of the national development program which Her Majesty referred to in the speech from the throne. We have also been told that if an equally good case can be made out the principle of this measure will be extended. But when we have sought to find out what the definition of an equally good case would be—and we spent a good deal of time trying to do this in committee the other day—we have been met with complete silence from the treasury benches.

Apparently we are not to be told. Apparently we are expected to vote blind. Apparently the government is ashamed of its national development program and does not want the public to know what it is. I say "apparently" because if the government thinks I am being unfair there is a very easy way of dealing with this argument, and that is to tell us what it is. We do know some things; a few things that we have been able to glean by persistent questioning. We do know that an equally good case cannot be made out by any private company producing electricity; in other words, if a private company wishes to refund an existing obligation or expand its production of electric power it may not do so under this policy, because