

Northern Power Commission Act

will commend itself to the government and it will adopt it. Perhaps this conference has produced some fruitful result.

Hon. Judd Buchanan (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, might I make a couple of comments. There are two or three thoughts here. First, it seems to me that we would be imposing upon the commission what is basically a housekeeping matter that the commission should deal with itself. It seems to me—this is why I was checking with those individuals among our colleagues who possess more legal expertise than I—that there could not be a lawfully constituted meeting unless all members of the commission or board were notified. We are endeavouring to check that point.

The reason I have some apprehension about this is because of the suggestion from my colleague who has had some experience with Ontario Hydro, indicating that often when emergencies arise it would be impossible to give four days' clear notice in advance. For example, you might want to get the group together on a conference telephone in order to try to deal with an immediate problem and you do not want to be tied to a four day mandatory period.

There might be some other way of accomplishing the hon. member's objective by making it mandatory to notify all commission members of all meetings, which would seem to me the logical and natural thing to do. The only question is, what do you do in an emergency if you are locked into a four day time frame and, secondly, are we getting into a housekeeping matter that the commission itself should decide?

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, a careful reading of the amendment will assure the minister and all hon. members that I am not at all tampering with the number of the quorum or the lawful constitution of any meeting. All I am suggesting in my amendment is that notice be given of any meeting to all commission members. I also said that I was not wedded to the four days. I only put four days in the amendment because my colleague from the Northwest Territories has a greater communications problem than we have in the Yukon. As far as the Yukon is concerned, 24 hours' notice means our man can get to Edmonton next day; but the situation is different in the Northwest Territories which has vastly greater communications problems than does the Yukon.

In the case of an emergency where a meeting has to be held in a hurry—the example cited by the minister—I am sure that as long as the territorial members were notified of a meeting that was about to be held, then at least the opportunity would be given to each individual member, if for some reason or other he was unable to get to the place of the meeting, which presumably would be in Edmonton, to give his views by telephone. There are some communities in the Northwest Territories without normal telephone services, but even they are able to communicate by means of Anik. In the Yukon territory there is no such problem: we have instant communication with the outside at all times.

I notice my colleague from the Northwest Territories is in his seat. As I say, I am not wedded to the four days; this is really a question of timing for him and the minister. We would be quite happy with 24 hours. Perhaps the hon. member for Northwest Territories might state his views

[Mr. Nielsen.]

and the minister could adopt what I feel is a very reasonable request of the government. This amendment including one member from each territory is not mere window dressing. It will ensure that they become meaningfully involved in the decision making process.

Mr. Buchanan: Mr. Speaker, while we are on the two northerners, I did omit to say something in my earlier comments. I feel that the hon. member for Yukon has not given adequate credit. He mentioned we have now moved from the situation that has existed up until recently where the Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development was also the Chairman of the Northern Canada Power Commission. We have moved away from this situation, and the chairman is now the Commissioner of the Yukon Territory. This is in line with trying to give northerners a more meaningful and significant say in matters bearing directly upon them and upon their well-being.

Coincidentally, I might mention at the same time that the position of Director of Panarctic Oils was also filled by the deputy minister. The Commissioner of the Northwest Territories now fills that post, again with the idea of giving northerners a more significant say, which is something to which I am committed. The commissioner is interested in the well-being of the north—

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, forgive me for interrupting the minister, but I merely resumed my seat in order to permit him to make an interjection and perhaps to accede to my amendment. I do not want it thought for a moment that I am giving up my right to my full time in this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): The Chair might point out to hon. members that we are not in committee of the whole. It is not the practice, at this stage of debate on a bill, when members are speaking to allow ministers to rise and interject. There is a proper way to proceed, which is for a member to make his speech and then for the minister to reply. In the interests of advancing the bill the Chair has been lenient, but I think the proper procedure should be recognized and followed.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, it has long been the practice of the House for a member who has the floor to take his seat in order to permit an interjection or question. This is what I was doing by way of courtesy to the minister, and if he wishes to continue to do so I would be happy to take my seat so long as it is understood that I can continue.

Mr. Buchanan: Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether some compromise could be reached here. As I was saying, I am concerned about an emergency situation. I do not think the four days is that crucial. We do not want to lock the commission into a situation where it is obligated to wait four days when it has a crisis on its hands. The hon. member might want to address his mind to that point and see whether he can insert a phrase into his amendment to cover that situation. I really do not have that much difficulty with the amendment.

Mr. Nielsen: I do have a suggestion in that regard. Again I do not know what my colleague, the hon. member for the Northwest Territories, would consider as a reasonable time, but the four days was inserted on his behalf and not on behalf of my party.