

*Northern Canada Power Commission Act*

.0145 or .0175? In the provinces this task is, quite properly, conducted by electric utilities boards or public utilities commissions, and it should be done in that fashion in the north.

The amendment before the House would put the responsibility for approval of rates in the hands of the commissioner in council in each of the territorial councils of the northern territories. Because the Chair, on March 26, raised some doubt as to motion No. 4 standing in my name on the order paper, it very much comes into the debate at this stage because if we pass over this amendment—I hope the hon. member for Northwest Territories is listening—and lose it, and if the Chair rules motion No. 4 out of order, there is no backtracking in an effort to make the setting of rates under this clause of the bill subject to the regulation of the local public utilities boards in the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

For that reason, there will be an amendment to this amendment standing in my name, which will be moved by one of my colleagues. In effect, it would make the setting of rates under this clause of the bill subject to the approval of the Yukon and Northwest Territories public utilities boards. If that amendment to this motion fails, then we are left with the choice of substituting the commissioner in council for the governor in council. Of course, if my amendment fails, we are back where we on this side do not want to be, that is, having the rates set subject to the approval of the governor in council. This choice should at least be put to the House and made available to the people of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. For those who are unfamiliar with the motion that will be debated in a moment or two—that is, motion No. 4 standing in my name—it calls for the whole of the activities of the commission to be subject to the regulatory control of the Northwest Territories or the Yukon public utilities board, as the case may be.

I want to put things in perspective for a moment, Mr. Speaker. When the legislation was passed in 1948 there was no question that the NCPC was going to be a power monopoly in the north. There was no question that they were going to be the sole generators and distributors of electrical energy in the two northern territories. The principle put forward at that time upon which basis the bill received passage was that the commission was to assist the development of industry in the north by making available a source of electrical energy. According to the minister of the day, a Mr. MacKinnon, the object was to supply electrical power at as low a cost as possible, subject to the plants being self-sustaining.

That was the assurance given by a minister of the Crown when this commission was created. We seem to have departed from that principle and the present minister in particular seems to have departed from it. I will come to that in a moment. In the debate on this matter on June 14, 1948, as reported at page 5171 of *Hansard* Mr. MacKinnon said:

With the approval of the governor in council—

This bears directly on what we are discussing.

—the commission shall establish schedules or ranges of rates for the power it supplies on the basis of not less than cost, which will include interest on the principal amount made or deemed to have been made to the commission in respect of the plant supplying the power, and all

[Mr. Nielsen.]

costs of operation and maintenance of the plant lines and other structures, together with costs of administration and salaries. Charges will also cover the establishment and maintenance of a contingency reserve fund. Rates are to be reviewed annually by the commission.

• (1600)

These matters are reviewed in the provinces by bodies directly responsible to the elected representatives of the people of those provinces. This is not the case with respect to the territories and clause 4 of the bill, which we seek to amend, at present does not provide for such review. We seek to amend clause 4 and to provide for one of two alternatives. We want the setting of rates, as was suggested in the debate of 1948, to be subject to the regulations of our own public utilities boards or, failing that, we want to make the setting of these rates by the commission subject to the decision of the commissioner in council of each of the territories, and in that way give some input power, some responsibility to the elected representatives of the people of the two northern territories, or to agencies responsible to them, rather than to the minister or the governor in council.

A prime example of this government's colonial approach, if I may use that phrase, was made manifest by the answer which the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Buchanan) gave me when I asked who was representing the people of the northern territories with respect to the pricing of oil at the first ministers' conference now being held here. I was not surprised to hear him say that the people of the two northern territories were not represented by any elected representative. I am used to hearing that kind of answer from the treasury benches. All the same, I was astonished to hear the minister admit that he does not even know the names of his own bureaucrats who are listening at the conference and ostensibly protecting the interests of the people of the north.

I suppose the government's view is that we of the north do not know enough to run our own affairs and that the people in Ottawa, 4,000 miles away, know better how to set our electric power rates. If the government thinks that we do not know what electrical power rates should be charged for two, three or four-bedroom houses, and if the government in its schedule of national priorities puts such matters ahead of inflation and unemployment, I suggest that its priorities are distorted.

Allow me, Mr. Speaker, to refer again to the 1948 debate, particularly to remarks recorded at page 5173 of *Hansard* for June 14. An hon. member participating said that the Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation, a private corporation which was dredging for gold, was supplying power to the citizens of Dawson city at exorbitant rates. Mr. Archibald said:

The company there had its own electric plants to operate the dredges, but it is taking the citizens of Dawson city to the cleaners through the high rates it is charging.

Some 26 years later, the people of the area are still complaining that the Northern Canada Power Commission is taking them to the cleaners. The commission held a public meeting, the first of its kind, in the Yukon. I do not know whether the same has been done in the Northwest Territories. The meeting took place in the last part of February, and about all it received were complaints about