

Alberta-B.C. Boundary Act

by the said commission to be the boundary between those provinces, at such time as the boundary line has been approved—

As I see it, the bill does not have any particular limitation of scope but the point I want to make, which I mentioned earlier, is that I suspect in some ways if we move the bill through without debate, without any statement from members on this side, we might be creating a false hope in communities that are having problems. The area with which I am concerned is, I realize, remote, much of it glaciated. There will be natural changes in boundaries, and surveys must be done. I agree with the hon. member for Rocky Mountain (Mr. Clark) that there should be provision for disclosure of intention as changes are made, and also for public input so that people are fully aware of what is going on each time a change is proposed and a dispute arises. This becomes absolutely crucial because of natural parks along boundaries. The federal government is very much involved in control over provincial lands because of our system of national parks.

Mr. Speaker, those are the points that I wished to bring to the attention of the House at this time.

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I, too, follow my colleagues reluctantly since we did have an understanding, not just among ourselves on this side of the House but also with members responsible for the bill on the other side, that this bill should be sent to committee. We regret that the time of the House is being taken up with the matter at this time. We feel that the work of the committee will be very important. As some of my colleagues have already said, this is not a matter that we can allow to proceed without debate. Neither is it a matter to be taken lightly by my colleagues in the House of Commons or by those who will be affected by any eventual change in boundary.

My first concern is about the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources being responsible for this bill in the first place. This indicates to me that if any boundary changes are to come about, they will be made with emphasis being placed on the resources that will be affected by such change. The constituency that I represent runs for 1,000 miles along the boundary between the province of British Columbia and the province of Alberta. In this area there are some very significant resources. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the northeastern portion of British Columbia has some large coal deposits which extend into the province of Alberta, and any boundary change in that area will certainly affect those resources. My colleagues have already mentioned the national parks. Canada's highest mountain, Mount Robson, is in my constituency and lies just outside Jasper national park. The people of Alberta often identify this great landmark with their own province, yet it is situated in the province of British Columbia.

However, I am more concerned with the people who will be affected than with the resources. I represent an area of British Columbia which has made a very strong case for secession from British Columbia to the province of Alberta, not because it is a geographic area that is totally isolated from its own province's economic area but it even has two time zones. When I call my constituency, the operator will invariably say, "Mr. Oberle, do you realize it is only seven o'clock in your constituency?" and I have to tell her no, it is eight o'clock. But she will insist. She will

[Mr. Johnston.]

say, "The number you are calling, area code 604, is British Columbia and there is a three-hour time difference". Every time I tell the operator that that is not so.

There is an area in British Columbia on Mountain standard time, which is Alberta time, and that is the Peace River area. The people in the Peace River country often have been alienated by their province economically, socially and in every other way. The economy of the Peace River country in British Columbia is based upon the economy of the Peace River country in Alberta. The supplies for the Peace River country come from Edmonton rather than from Vancouver. As I have said, their social and political affiliations lie with the province of Alberta as well. In northern British Columbia we do not feel it is a virtue to spread misery equally among everybody, which of course is the philosophy subscribed to by the present provincial government of British Columbia. That, of course, is one of the main reasons that part of the country has often made a case for secession from the province of British Columbia.

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Under the Department of Regional Economic Expansion there is an act, the name of which escapes me momentarily, in respect of rural farm improvement. With regard to that act, the provinces of Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan have certain privileges and rights. But the Peace River country, which has the same economic base, social problems and geographical location, does not have access to the services provided by the federal government simply because it is inside the province of British Columbia, which has never cared very much about the Peace River country.

There was always a great northern development philosophy in the province of British Columbia under a previous administration, and particularly under this administration which has really done nothing: there was a philosophy of government that all that was necessary was to build railways and highways into an area and people would look after themselves, they would move into the area, build their own social infrastructure and make life livable. That is not so in our modern day.

The government has direct responsibility in this very important area of communications. The federal department has never lived up to its responsibility. The quality of life in northeastern British Columbia simply is not the same as, and cannot be compared with, the quality of life in northwestern Alberta. I am making these comments in the form of a public statement in the hope that the government will recognize the very special need of the people in the northern part of my constituency.

We build railways and roads into this area, but only in order to plunder the resources. The giant Peace River dam never had an impact study. This was never considered by the federal government and the province of British Columbia. As a result, we have been burdened with a very grave situation. I think it would be in the interest of everybody in Canada today, particularly the federal government, to conduct a post-mortem on the Peace River dam in order to evaluate the damage done in respect of human resources, land, wildlife and the environment in general.