

Supply—Northern Affairs

Northern administration and lands branch—
Northwest Territories and other field services—

673. Operation and maintenance—to extend the purposes of vote 278 of the main estimates for 1959-60 to include the contribution detailed in these estimates, \$1.

Mr. Pickersgill: This is another dollar item.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): This item of \$1 is intended to amend the scope of vote No. 278 in the main estimates and the reason for the extension that is requested is to provide authorization to increase payment of a contribution to Taurcanis Mines Limited of 50 per cent of the cost of improving the airstrip and constructing an access road to the mine.

Mr. Pickersgill: I wonder if the minister could say something about this policy of the government paying 50 per cent of the cost of this airstrip? Is this applied uniformly across Canada, or is it done only in the Northwest Territories?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I am informed that it has not been applied in any other place but the territories. Under this policy, the Department of Transport contributes toward the cost of publicly used airports in certain circumstances. There is no provision in the policy by which federal contributions can be made towards private airstrips required by mining companies for the establishment and servicing of mining properties.

Mr. Pickersgill: Does this airstrip belong to the federal government?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): The land in question is crown land. The mining company concerned is working claims on crown land.

Mr. Pickersgill: I must say that from the point of view of the treasury this does seem to me to merit a little more explanation than the minister has given. If this mine were in northern Alberta, or Labrador, or somewhere else, then apparently the mining company would have to provide the airstrip itself. However, because it is in the Northwest Territories we are apparently paying half the cost. There must be some principle behind this, and that is what I am seeking to find.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): The principle is that where the public is permitted to make use of these airstrips it was felt proper that the federal government should contribute toward the cost. That is the basis of this present contribution, and the reason for the enlargement in the authorization attached to the vote of item 278 in the main estimates.

Mr. Pickersgill: I do not want to be difficult about this. We know there is not a very big public in the Northwest Territories. Most

of these settlements are not very large. It would be interesting to know, outside of this mining company and its employees and a few federal government officials who have to go there because the mine is there, just how much public use is made of this airstrip. I am not saying whether I object to the policy or not. I do not understand the policy, that is all, and I think that before we vote the money we should understand it.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): It has been found cheaper to encourage the use of these landing strips than it would be to construct roads. This, coupled with encouragement to open up the use of airstrips to the public, is the reason it was considered a sound policy to make this government contribution of 50 per cent toward the cost of providing an airstrip and an access road to the airstrip.

Mr. Pickersgill: The minister will understand, I am sure, that I would feel that a policy of this sort, if it is a good policy, would be equally good in Labrador which happens to be within the bounds of a province. I do not think the minister has given us any reason why this sort of thing should be applied specially to the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Thus far it has been applied only in the territories. After all, the federal government has responsibility for the development of resources in the territories, and as the program is developed it has been confined to the territories for that reason.

Mr. Pickersgill: I agree that the federal government has a responsibility for providing in the territories many of the services which the provincial governments provide in the provinces, but I do not know any provincial government which gives 50 per cent of the cost of building an airstrip for the building of a mine. There may be some who do. But it does seem to me that when we are dealing with a mining company we are not dealing with the territories or with a province; we are dealing with a mining company, and because it happens that a mine is in the territories I do not see why it should appear to be placed at an advantage which would not apply to another mining company elsewhere. The minister has given no convincing evidence that there is any real public use of this airstrip apart from that incidental to the working of the mine. I do not know where this place is; I do not pretend to know. It is only the principle in which I am interested.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): Perhaps the hon. gentleman is forgetting that the agreement in question with the Taurcanis Mines Limited