

*Northern Power Commission Act*

**Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain):** When the minister said in this House last year that he had no control over the Canadian Transport Commission, he was telling the truth. When he said there was a mess, he was telling the truth. Over the past year I sat in this House and watched my colleagues on this side attack the minister because he had no power. That is the fault. Parliament took away the power of the minister to control transportation in the National Transportation Act of 1967. Here we are doing the same thing. We have a new minister whom we are putting up on the wall, ready to pluck, because he will have no power when he is finished.

● (1640)

This is a matter of great seriousness. This whole tendency to turn the power of the legislative body over to independent boards does not have to be stopped. That is not the way to do it. It has to be made more sophisticated so that we can give them the authority we want them to have without interfering with their efficiency and, at the same time, maintain our democratic control as representatives of the people over the actions of those independent boards.

There are sophisticated ways of doing this. We have the precedents of the province of Saskatchewan and the government of Australia. All governments have this problem. In 1967 a motion was moved by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin), seconded by myself, pleading with the government of that day to not take away the control of parliament over the Canadian Transport Commission. The government, with the support of the NDP, turned down our amendment. The acting leader of the NDP at that time was a man called David Lewis. He held the view that parliament was not competent to deal with the details of transportation and that we should turn the power over to an independent board, leaving it completely independent of Parliament. That was the way to get efficiency in the modern state.

The point is that we do not have Superman or God to head these boards and agencies. We have ordinary mortals. We have had Mr. Pickersgill and Mr. Benson. The others will be the same. These men make mistakes. They know as much about transportation as most of us, which is as about as close to zero as you can get.

When this power is turned over to them with no way of checking by parliament, parliament gets the blast from the people when the failures and the mess occur. All parliament can do is throw the mess back at the minister, who is condemned in this House because he says there is a mess. He is an honest minister. He says there is nothing he can do about it because of the power of the Canadian Transport Commission.

I am not here to defend the Minister of Transport. I use this only as an example. I could say the same about the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board, the minister who reports for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, or the minister who reports on northern transportation. I could do it for every one of the 59 agencies and boards to which we have turned over this power. We have destroyed a little more of the democratic power that should rest with the people.

[Mr. Nielsen.]

There is a democratic and sophisticated way to maintain the correct amount of power needed to touch base and control these delegated powers. It is not yet the law of this land, but please God it will be before too long. I say to the minister that the minute you set up these amendments, you turn over the power of running the power operations of the north to an independent body. No matter how much you respect the chairman and the members of that power commission who will be appointed, the fact is that they are not God. There has to be a check by some democratic body over their actions or we will continue the mistakes we have making for the past 25 years.

On the broad general principle of the control of independent boards and commissions by a representative body, I think that this amendment moved by the government striking out 6(2) and (3) is completely undemocratic. It is completely against the interest of the people of the Yukon and Northwest Territories. It is certainly repeating the same mistake that has been made for the past 25 years.

I now come to my second point. This is what I am appalled by with respect to the hon. member for Yukon. For all the years I have known him he has fought, as a tiger has fought, to try to get more control into the hands of the legislatures of the Yukon and Northwest Territories. Yet here he is asking us to retain power in the hands of the Governor in Council, in the hands of the cabinet. I cannot understand that. What he is really trying to do is head off the dangers of one thing to get us back into the dangers of another.

I suggest to the minister a very simple amendment that will solve most of my problems and, I am sure, the problems of the hon. member for Yukon and the hon. member for Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth). I simply suggest that we leave in subsection 6(3) and change one phrase. That phrase is that the Governor in Council is the executive of the territorial legislature. That is all. In this way we would at least have some people with some democratic control over this independent board.

We know from practice that this is not going to put a great economic load on the Government of Canada. We know as a fact that the operations of this power commission are paid for by the people who pay the rates, and why shouldn't they? Through their elected representatives, and appointed representatives in the legislatures in the territories, they have the right to make this independent board touch base with them. This would meet the proposition of trying to get the authority out of the hands of politicians and into the hands of an independent board to make bigger decisions, but leaving a sophisticated way for them to touch base with the democratically elected authorities. I believe that would meet the position of the hon. member for Yukon.

**Mr. Nielsen:** We'll never get it.

**Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain):** The hon. member says we will never get it. We have a new Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Buchanan). He wants to avoid the mistakes of other ministers who turned over their powers to independent boards and then had to accept all the blame for their actions.

I suggest we can do two things with one stroke. I suggest that we leave subsection (3) in the act and simply