

Government Orders

We have seen ample evidence that decisions that are very important to certain regions and certain provinces are made on political grounds I can see under this process under which no public hearing would be called where the members of a large province might say that it is in our interest as a province, or the area of Canada from which we come, to export substantially increased amounts of electricity to the United States when, in fact, it would be quite contrary to the national good. Again, this shows the political clout of large provinces, at least when it comes to population.

Let me simply conclude by repeating the idea that electricity will soon be seen as a strategic resource in the future of our country, not simply another commodity for export. I suggest that because it will be a strategic resource of the future it should be carefully and jealously husbanded and that means carefully regulated. We should ensure that there is always an opportunity for public hearings so the public's interest can be presented and the decision can be made in the interest of the public. We should ensure that decisions for electricity export are not politicized and are made as independent from the political process as possible. We should protect the independence of the chief regulatory body, in this case the National Energy Board, and we should certainly not increase the duration of export licences by 20 per cent. Twenty-five years is more than ample.

Always over our shoulder is the haunting spectre of the free trade deal. Many of us felt that this was simply a major step so the United States could get more control and more access to our natural resources which are of strategic importance; oil, gas and electricity. Now we see bills and legislation moving through the House to facilitate that opportunity, not for Canadians but for the United States and for Americans.

We should ensure that Canadians, not Americans, gain the most from our Canadian resources. This bill obviously needs to be seriously reworked. For that reason the New Democratic Party will vote against it at this stage. It is ill-conceived; it is wrong-headed; it is not acting in our best interests. We hope, Mr. Speaker, since the government majority will likely pass this bill at second reading, that at least during committee hearings and report stage sufficient amendments can be included to make this bill advantageous for Canada as opposed to advantageous for the United States of America.

Hon. Roger C. Simmons (Burin—St. George's): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Cape Breton—The Sydneys, in leading off the debate for our side, has said essentially what we need to say on this in so far as the provisions of the bill are concerned. I rise though because there is an aspect of the bill, certainly an implication in the bill, which has some particular specific import for the province that I have the honour to represent here together with a number of other people.

First, as has been said by a number of people, this bill seeks to facilitate the export of electricity to the United States. I could spend some time on that issue if I did not want to save my time for the other issue that I will identify in a moment. Just in passing, it seems that the garage sale of Canada continues. Come May, the month everybody decides to have a fire sale of sorts, they have what has come to be known in Canada as the backyard sale or the garage sale. Often you sell things you do not need, but that is not the analogy I am drawing here. You often sell them at fire sale prices and that is the analogy I am drawing here.

The garage sale of Canada continues. Everything is for sale at bargain-basement prices, but there is only one customer, the United States. I guess the garage sale analogy is not a particularly good one because even as a garage sale it is very restricted.

I want to come to another issue that is of concern to me, and I believe to many in this chamber, and that relates to the inconsistency here, the incongruity between, on the one hand, facilitating the export of electricity to the United States while at the same time preventing one province of Canada, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, from moving its electricity across provincial barriers. This issue has a long and bitter history. It is not yet resolved and it is far from resolved. We who live in the province suffer because of the present situation.

I want to draw a parallel for you, Mr. Speaker, that you will be familiar with. We have our pipelines bringing gas from western Canada to Ontario and Quebec. There was never ever any question at the time it was proposed about the right to put the pipeline through the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba so that the gas could be transported into Ontario. It was understood and facilitated by the federal government of the day that if there was a product, in this case gas, in western Canada that needed to be moved to the central and eastern Canada market that it ought to move. If that required a physical trespass of the provinces in between, in this case Saskatchewan and Manitoba, so be it.