

Adjournment Debate

The subsidies on electric power to residents of the North outside of the Territory capitals were extended to March, 1984. This program, coupled with the 6 and 5 per cent price guidelines which the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Munro) directed the Northern Canada Power Commission to adopt has saved consumers many millions of dollars in both Yukon and the Northwest Territories. The cost is fully absorbed by the federal Government.

It should be noted that rather than reducing capital spending during a period of reduced demand, the Government has in fact dramatically expanded the expenditures for capital works by the Northern Canada Power Commission. In 1981-82, NCPC capital expenditures were less than \$10 million. This was increased to over \$40 million in 1982-83, and for the current year is expected to be in excess of \$20 million. These expenditures are for hydro investment which should enhance stability in electricity costs over the long-term. They are also a major source for construction employment throughout the North. This is a start on a long-term objective to reduce reliance on diesel powered generating plants.

The Penner Report did not address the issue of how to reduce costs over the long term other than by further expensive Government subsidies to consumers. It is the Government's belief that equitable pricing of energy in the North is necessary. However, this should be coupled with programs that encourage energy conservation and with programs that provide alternative sources of energy. Activities of the federal Government are now concentrated on achieving these objectives.

With respect to the equity of electricity pricing, the Minister requested that the NEB examine the methodologies of rate setting by the Northern Canada Power Commission and assess alternative approaches to regulation of electrical rates. The proposal in the subcommittee report that rate ceilings be fixed, regardless of generating costs, would discourage conservation and delay the development of more cost effective alternative energy sources. The Minister's discussions with the territorial Governments have also confirmed that they too are primarily concerned with the development of local alternate energy sources.

The recent decline in energy demand in the North illustrates the vulnerability of any utility which relies on such a small number of customers for its revenue. In times of acute financial decline, NCPC as a federal Crown corporation can still receive some form of assistance from the federal Government. Any change in ownership of NCPC would alter this support and the financial implications of this are still being examined.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I regret interrupting the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary, but the time allotted to him has expired.

CANADIAN TRANSPORT COMMISSION—RULINGS ON RAILWAY BRANCH LINE ABANDONMENTS IN MANITOBA. (B) REQUEST FOR PROTECTION OF SUBDIVISIONS

Mr. Laverne Lewycky (Dauphin-Swan River): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to follow up on a question I raised on Thursday, May 12, with the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin). I am especially happy since my fiancé, Lois Reimer, is

in the gallery tonight to observe me debate this particular question.

I was not very happy on the day the Minister of Transport responded to my question because he mentioned that he was very happy with the record of the Canadian Transport Commission. He said that 88 per cent of the branch line systems we had in the 1930s were currently in place in western Canada. I tried to point out to the Minister at that time that 100 per cent of the submissions the CN and CP had made in Manitoba were abandoned. I was very displeased by the Minister's use of those kind of statistics because he certainly did not seem to be grappling with the particular problem.

I have a list of the 18 hearings that have been held in Manitoba by the CTC. The CTC had established a western arm with the sole purpose of assuring that a more sensitive and decentralized hearing would be given to the people in western Canada whose rail lines were being abandoned. We have the record of the CTC hearings regarding the Cabot subdivision, the Boisevain subdivision, the Varcoe subdivision, the Ridgeville subdivision, the Neepawa subdivision, Pleasant Point subdivision, Carman subdivision as far as the CN is concerned, and the Carman subdivision as far as the CP is concerned, the Wawanesa subdivision, the Hartney subdivision, the Lenore subdivision, the Neepawa subdivision, the Rossburn subdivision, the Lyleton subdivision, the Oakland subdivision, a portion of the Erwood subdivision, the Winnipegosis subdivision and the Inwood subdivision.

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I list all these hearings because I think it is important to see what has been happening in western Canada as far as rail line abandonment is concerned, and so the Government can understand the frustration of people in western Canada in constituencies such as Dauphin-Swan River. When a hearing comes to town it is referred to as a three-ring circus. The hoops are set up and constituents are expected to hop through them. The results of the hearing are given out even before the CTC has had an opportunity to read the submissions that have been filed.

I express concern at this time because I think it is high time the Minister looked into the situation and at some of the lines that have been slated for abandonment to ensure that some positive action is taken.

I want to refer to at least two subdivisions which are slated for abandonment in my riding. The Oakland subdivision is slated for abandonment on August 31, 1984. Four Manitoba pool elevators operate on the portion of the line which is up for abandonment, and one of the elevators on this line was upgraded considerably during the Spring of 1982. The grain producers of the area depend very heavily on this line because otherwise they would be faced with insurmountable long hauls for their grain.

I know that the Parliamentary Secretary was not able to be here tonight. When I raised this issue with him and told him that 18 hearings were held, and that 17 of the decisions on