

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion (Mr. Whittaker) negated.

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture) moved that Bill C-34, to amend the Farm Credit Act, as reported (without amendment) from the Standing Committee on Agriculture, be concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): When shall the bill be read the third time?

Some hon. Members: By leave, now.

● (1530)

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Mr. Speaker, we would be glad to give our consent to third reading of the bill at this time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): Is it agreed, by unanimous consent, that the bill be read the third time now?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Whelan moved that the bill be read the third time and do pass.

Motion agreed to and bill read the third time and passed.

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NORTHERN CANADA POWER COMMISSION ACT

AMENDMENTS TO CONSTITUTION AND POWERS OF COMMISSION

The House resumed, from Wednesday, March 26, consideration of Bill C-13, to amend the Northern Canada Power Commission Act, as reported (without amendment) from the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and motion No. 2 of Mr. Nielsen.

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Speaker, let me refresh the memory of hon. members on the nature of the amendment before us by saying that the bill that has been introduced in the name of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Buchanan) would delete subsections (1) and (2) of section 6 of the present act. Subsection (2) of the act presently in force requires the Northern Canada Power Commission to account to the governor in council for certain expenditures over the limit of \$50,000. The proposal by the minister and the governor in council is to remove that requirement of accountability and in effect to allow the commission to act on its own, to make expenditures on its own, and to act in every other way without the requirement of being accountable to the governor in council or to the House.

The amendment by my colleague, the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen), representing as he does the interests of the people of the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, would reinstate the requirement of accountability on

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behalf of the Northern Canada Power Commission. In view of inflation and for other reasons it might be advisable to change the dollar limit and perhaps to require accountability for expenditures of a higher range than is now the case. That is a matter which we on this side of the House would be prepared seriously to consider. But that is an entirely different question from removing accountability altogether, and it is the total removal of accountability which the minister is now proposing.

As members on this side have made clear on several occasions in questioning in committee and in the House, we would prefer the accountability of the commission to be to the councils of the territories and, preferably to the elected members of those councils. But that is not something we could achieve here today, so we will have to settle for a lesser kind of accountability. Again I emphasize that even a lesser kind of accountability is far preferred to no accountability at all. What the minister is proposing is to establish for that commission the capacity to act without any kind of accountability except as may trickle back through the public service appointments to the board of that corporation.

I simply wish to draw to the attention of the House two very dangerous aspects of the proposal of the government. First is the question of the principle that the Parliament of Canada should be able to exercise some control over the activities of agencies acting in the public name and spending public money, such as the Northern Canada Power Commission. They should not be allowed, particularly a commission of this sort with its special functions, to operate totally freely. That is the principle, and it is a matter which is of particular concern to us here, now, because the capacity of parliament to oversee and to control the activities of various agencies to whose existence we give approval has been eroded over time. So it is important to us as an institution, and to my colleagues and myself, not to allow one more instance of erosion in this case.

The matter of the accountability of public institutions to publicly elected officials is far too important to let it lapse in a case such as this, which might not command the interest of many members of this House, particularly members on the government side, because perhaps they are not interested in what goes on in northern Canada. However, we on this side are interested in what goes on in northern Canada and in the principle that parliament should have the power, not only to spend public funds but also to set public policy in matters which affect the national destiny and to require from public agencies accountability to this institution if it is not possible for them to be held accountable directly to the elected representatives of the people of the Yukon or the Northwest Territories. So the first objection I have to the proposal by the minister to create this unaccountable corporation is one of principle.

My second objection is to the fact that the Northern Canada Power Commission would have the capacity to undertake ventures, to issue regulations and to act in other ways which could cause serious harm to the environment of northern Canada, and which could involve us in major projects undertaken solely at the discretion of the commission without giving us a chance of review or veto,