

Northern Power Commission Act

legislation. But I do not believe it was the serious intention to wipe out any limitation. I will be extremely surprised if it is so. I cannot agree with wiping out any accountability or any control by government, or by cabinet, over the economic decisions of the commission.

● (1620)

As a responsible parliamentarian in the opposition I would have to oppose this vigorously. I am not usually one to argue that power should reside in the cabinet, but I am doing so now because I am frightened of the decisions that could be made by the commission on its own if the cabinet does not retain the control it now has under section 6(3). I would have to vote against the deletion of subsection (3) from the legislation for that reason. I hope that the minister would consider that feature of the bill in the light of the remarks I have made, and perhaps give favourable consideration to the retention of subsection (3). That is all that my amendment in motion No. 2 seeks to accomplish, to retain cabinet control over the financial decisions of the commission.

I am not wedded to the \$50,000 figure. That could be increased in keeping with the desire to enable the commission to make decisions in today's economic over-all fabric without stultifying the responsibilities imposed on it under the legislation. I would urge that upon the minister for favourable consideration.

Mr. Firth: Mr. Speaker, the remarks just made by the hon. member for Yukon sound like a speech in favour of colonialism.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Firth: I am sure the Northwest Territories would not be in favour of his motion. We are asking for more autonomy, not more restrictions. I should therefore like to address my few remarks to this motion and say that I do not like it. I think the commission should have the right to generate and distribute electrical power for the people of the Northwest Territories, and I do not think the bill goes far enough. The hon. member for Yukon is correct in saying that I am in favour of a Crown corporation to perform this public service. I am therefore not in favour of his amendment, Mr. Speaker, as it is too cumbersome and places too much restriction on the commission.

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few remarks in rebuttal of the remarks of the hon. member for the Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth), who accuses the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) of supporting colonialism. I am afraid his memory is somewhat faulty.

When this bill was before committee there was discussion on the question of autonomy for the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. It was pointed out to the minister and his officials that we would propose to increase the size of the commission to seven members, four of them to come from the northern territories. I suggest that the hon. member for the Northwest Territories was not at that meeting. The reluctance of the minister to allow us to make changes that would place the burden of responsibility for this important service in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon in the hands of northerners has given rise

[Mr. Nielsen.]

to suspicion. I want to defend my colleague from the Yukon.

Mrs. Campagnolo: He can defend himself.

Mr. Oberle: No, I want to say something in his favour, if you will allow me. He is under a lot of pressure on this matter and has had to take a lonely stand. He represents a constituency of some 207,000 square miles, and it is natural for him to be suspicious because the government and the Canadian people have not previously worried too much about those frozen plains up there. At times, and particularly during committee discussion of this subject, he did not receive much support from the other northern territory.

The hon. member said that he wanted four days for the transmission of telegrams and telephone calls and for travel when the two people from the north came down to meet with the commission. An interesting situation came up in committee and I should like to refer to it. I may be a little sarcastic, but it shows why northerners are suspicious.

There was one person who represented municipalities in the Yukon and the northern territories, and there were others who represented chambers of commerce and other concerned citizens. At one time a telex was presented to the committee which stated that Yukon municipalities were upset by a certain clause in the bill. At the next meeting of the committee one of the members in the party opposite asked an official of the power commission if he had confirmed the validity of the telex. Mr. Speaker, I want you to listen to this carefully. We had a telegram from someone in the Yukon stating that he represented municipalities in that territory and, because a member of the government requested it, it was necessary to confirm the validity of the telegram by phoning the people he claimed to represent.

Mrs. Campagnolo: What did he say?

Mr. Oberle: If the hon. member wants me to I will gladly read into the record what she said. However, I am a gentleman and I will not do it.

It is for the reason that I have just outlined that northerners are suspicious, Mr. Speaker. If northerners were as suspicious as southerners, then as soon as a member of the power commission received a telegram or a phone call, he would have to find out if the document or call was valid. Not until he had done this could he make an arrangement to travel to the head office in Edmonton. It is not a foregone conclusion that such person would live in Whitehorse or Dawson City, where there are air connections.

Of course northerners are suspicious. They know that if the minister wanted to create an emergency situation—this has been done but I know the present minister would not do it—but if he wanted to he could call the commission together and the northern members could not get to the meeting. Decisions could then be made in their absence, and the northerners would have even less control than they have now.