

*Government Orders*

A country always tries to take advantage of its assets in terms of becoming competitive in the international market. One of the things that Canada has that puts us ahead of so many other countries is in fact a widespread energy base. We have abundant energy resources and we should be taking advantage of this in terms of developing our economic infrastructure. That is why some of us are very concerned about the implications in this bill. Are we simply giving away this trump card we have in terms of dealing in the international market-place.

I do not have to remind you, Mr. Speaker, that electricity is of vital importance to our country and it is this importance that encourages me to participate in this debate today.

However, I must say that I rise for another reason. It is my firm belief that electricity will become even more important in the future, indeed strategic in the future when we will finally begin to take some initial steps toward addressing the serious problem of global warming caused, in large part, by the emissions of carbon dioxide.

In the last few days we have discussed the cuts to VIA Rail and the environmental insensitivity of that decision. I think we are all hoping for the day when we see electrical driven high speed trains in the major corridors of the country. That would be a major advancement in reducing carbon dioxide emissions and a major move toward cleaning up environmental pollution. Obviously in the future electricity is going to be playing an even more important role than it has played in the past.

Because of this importance, how we regulate electricity in the years to come should receive very serious consideration. This bill before us leads us, quite frankly, to a host of concerns. I think it is fair to say that the reasons for regulation of electricity exports include that it is important for Canadian consumers to have a secure supply. In the past government departments said: "We have an ample supply of oil for decades in the future", and we found ourselves in an oil shortage not long after. Therefore, there is a concern among Canadian citizens that we take steps to ensure that we have a secure supply long into the future for our own consumption purposes.

It is also important to Canadians to have reasonably equal access, regardless of where they happen to live in the country. We are fortunate to be blessed with hydroelectric resources throughout the country. However, there are some areas that are more advantaged than others. We have to recognize that we, as a national institution, have an obligation to ensure that all Canadians, regardless of where they happen to live, have equal and fair access to our hydroelectric resources.

As well, it is important to regulate the industry to assist development in the regions. A number of countries, particularly western European countries that are led by social democratic parties, use electricity to encourage economic development in more remote areas, to encourage manufacturing and so on in areas where probably it would not normally take place but where it provides job opportunities and so on in the hinterland, so to speak. We must do that as well as being opposed to concentrating all of our economic activity in the growth areas of southern Ontario and other specific locations throughout the country.

Another reason for regulation of our electricity exports is that it is important to balance the interests of investors with the over-all public interest. If the industry is not properly and adequately regulated, it is conceivable that electrical monopolies which are shielded from competition could gouge their customers—and we know of those examples—or that a group of investors or, indeed, even a province could push through a profitable electrical enterprise that would pollute the surrounding area, for example, and would not be in the national interest. Or we can foresee short-sighted decisions taken today that could cause future generations to pay more for their power than would have been the case if the plight of future generations had been considered by a well-established and independent regulatory authority.

Obviously, there are a number of reasons why regulation is necessary. I do not have to remind you, Mr. Speaker, of the current regulatory system. It is well understood. However, perhaps one aspect of our present system bears repeating, and that is that the National Energy Board conducts a public hearing and uses the evidence presented in that open public forum to judge whether the proposal is in the public interest or not. That public hearing process is critical.