

Northern Canada Power Commission Act

words after the word "case" in line 6 of the said motion No. 3, and substituting therefor the following:

"the Public Utilities Board of the Yukon Territory or the Northwest Territories as the case may be".

What we are proposing by this amendment is the substitution of the public utilities board in each of the territories for the commissioner in council. This will mean that the boards responsible in each of the territories will have the opportunity of considering and deciding on the rates that will be charged by the commission. It is important that we give the territories more and more responsibility as the days and years go by, because the people there are now or will ultimately be entitled to self-government. I think all of us on this side of the House—in fact, on all sides—are looking forward to that day. I urge the minister to seriously consider supporting this amendment to motion No. 3.

● (1640)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): The Chair would like to study further the amendment of the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil), and perhaps with the agreement of the House the debate could continue and a decision might be rendered later.

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): Madam Speaker, I do not intend to speak at great length on this matter. I gather that it would be inappropriate for me at this stage to speak to the amendment under consideration. I think the principle is the same in either case; it is the principle of having decisions which affect the localities of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon decided in those localities rather than by the cabinet or the governor in council. I would hope and expect, from what the minister said in speaking on the previous amendment, that this is a change which would recommend itself to the minister and the government precisely because it helps avoid the kind of red tape about which he was speaking with respect to the earlier amendment.

What we have in the bill the minister has introduced—which has come through the change that we are now considering—is really a quite remarkable proposal to anyone acquainted with the situation in the colonial parts of Canada, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. It is a situation where utility rates in those areas must come to the federal cabinet for decision. As a representative in this House of the national parks, I am acquainted with that kind of situation because in the townsites of Banff and Jasper questions concerning the licensing of dogs must be decided by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. As a result of the minister following the initiative of the committee of which he was a distinguished chairman, that situation is likely soon to change: at least, I understand that changes are in the works.

Unfortunately, there has not been as much movement toward bringing a kind of real democracy to the northern territories as there has been in respect of bringing a greater degree of democracy to local governments in townsites within the national parks. I think it is a quite remarkable fact that in this bill the government again appears to be attempting to confirm the unhappy colonial status of residents of the two great territories of the north, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, by making

[Mr. Neil.]

them, in effect, come to the cabinet of Canada for approval for setting rates relating to the Northern Canada Power Commission.

Both proposals, the original motion of my colleague the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) and the amendment introduced by my colleague the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil), would allow that matter—which surely is a local matter, because if anything is a local matter, utility rates are—to be decided in the territories either by the commissioner and the council or more directly, as proposed by my friend from Moose Jaw, by the public utility boards of the respective territories.

It is very tempting to consider the kind of arrangement the cabinet would have to establish to deal with its heavy responsibility of adjudicating rates in respect of turning on or off the lights in the Northwest Territories or the Yukon. We do not know much about what goes on in cabinet, but one thing we do know is that it has a very active committee system; various ministers are assigned special responsibilities concerning committees of cabinet. If this bill should pass without the amendment, I presume this would mean that a special subcommittee would be established to deal with turning off and on the lights in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon.

Mr. Nielsen: Let there be light.

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): This is an indication of the absurdity of a responsibility, which is essentially a local responsibility related to essentially a local matter, being held by the cabinet of Canada. What alarms us here is not simply the absurdity of it, because I confess we have become rather accustomed to absurdity from that side of the House, but rather that this is one more instance of clinging colonialism which unfortunately has been the hallmark of the attitude of this government toward the people, including the elected representatives of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon.

Unless there is some compelling reason which is not evident to us as to why this must be a matter for the attention of the Prime Minister of Canada—that is, the turning on and off of the lights in the territories—and unless we can be shown that there is some compelling requirement for this matter to occupy the attention of these people, it would seem to be absurd that this power should not be vested where it belongs, that is, with the people and institutions of the parts of Canada which exclusively it affects.

My colleague suggested that perhaps there is some kind of association with the biblical phrase "Let there be light," and that a responsibility which has to do with such authority could not be delegated to mere colonials in the territories. I think that if there is a justification for this absurd action, it is a justification of similar absurdity. What we propose here, if these amendments are approved and come before the House for final consideration, is a change which would be simple to accomplish and which in fact would have limited significance to the role of the House of Commons, but would clear away from the cabinet—which we hope is occupied with other things—the heavy responsibility for turning on and off the lights in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. It would also clear away the impression symbolized by this act that