

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Speaker, my two colleagues from the Yukon and from Brandon-Souris speak with authority. One of them represents one of the territories whose future we are discussing tonight; the other has served as minister responsible for those territories during a period which the residents there look back on as a welcome change in attitude on the part of the federal government toward developing some degree of local self-government in the territories, a change that unfortunately was undone in the years following 1963.

In effect this amendment contains two elements. The first has to do with the provision that the advice must be not simply to the commissioner who, as has been pointed out, and as is well known in the north, is too often an extension of officialdom in Ottawa, but instead to the elected councils of the Yukon and Northwest Territories. These are people whose mandate is not simply given by a minister in Ottawa; theirs is a mixed mandate, partly from Ottawa now but also partly from the people whose lives, whose ability to turn off and on lights, and whose requirement to pay the bill, are most particularly affected.

As the bill introduced by the minister stands, the requirement is simply to report to the commissioner after an investigation. Further as is well known, the Commissioner of the Yukon or the Northwest Territories is really the minister in disguise. He is the arm of the minister, appointed by the minister and answerable to the minister. He is the creature of the minister and, as a matter of practice, he acts in much closer liaison with the minister and anonymous officials in Ottawa than he does with the people whose lives he in effect controls as commissioner of those territories. In effect there is only an option on paper now, not an option in fact. The option on paper is either to report directly to the minister or to report to him in other clothes.

The bill as it stands is even more absurd than that. Under the amendments to the Northern Canada Power Commission Act the chairman of the Northern Canada Power Commission is also the Commissioner of the Yukon Territory. So what the minister would have us do is have the chairman report to himself. It reminds one, as someone standing behind me said a moment ago, of the old song "I'm my own grandma".

While many of us on this side of the House are aware that the actions of the government frequently leave people talking to themselves, this must surely be the first time that it has been written into a statute. It seems to be clearly an oversight, an absurdity, in order to give the appearance of creating an option, to require that the Commissioner of the Yukon Territory, in his capacity as chairman of the Northern Canada Power Commission, report to himself; to require that he report not to the minister, but to the minister in disguise in the territories—the commissioner.

What the amendment does is to give status to the elected council as well as eradicate an absurdity now in the law. It is primarily a democratic amendment, what I might call a symbolic amendment, indicating that the Parliament of Canada recognizes the importance of the councils of the Yukon and Northwest Territories, and that it is not content simply to leave a reference to the governing body of that council to the commissioner acting alone.

Northern Canada Power Commission Act

Perhaps not many members on the government side of the House had, or have taken, the opportunity that many of us on this side have had to visit northern Canada and speak directly with the people there, people who have lived for too long with what, in effect, is a colonial regime where all important decisions are taken at a great distance from them. Those who have visited those territories, many of them in the Progressive Conservative party, and have listened to the concerns of the people there, not allowing themselves to be misled by the emanations of the bureaucracy, know the concern of the people there about self-government, about having the ability to control their own destiny. We also know that progress toward some degree of self-government in the Yukon and Northwest Territories has been glacially slow. Although progress was made during the period when my colleague from Brandon-Souris was minister responsible for the territories, since that time progress has, as I say, been glacially slow.

While there is not much that we can do now in amending this particular bill to add substantial powers, or give added status to the councils of the Northwest Territories and Yukon territory, we can at least make the symbolic act of passing this democratic amendment which requires that there be a reporting not simply to an official named by Ottawa but instead to the whole council, which is comprised of directly elected people of the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

That is the first of the two elements of the amendment proposed by my colleague from Yukon. I repeat that it would remove the absurdity of having the chairman of the Northern Canada Power Commission report to himself because he wears both hats, that of the chairman of the commission, and that of the Commissioner of the Yukon Territory. The amendment would also have the symbolic and democratic effect of offering some satisfaction to the people of the Yukon and Northwest Territories that there are members of the House of Commons who, even with the limited capacity before them tonight, are prepared to make a stand regarding the right of these people at least to be consulted.

The second element of this amendment has to do with the apparent wish of the minister to remove from the Northern Canada Power Commission the requirement that was placed upon it some years ago—more than 20 years ago when the commission was established—that the rates produce a revenue equal to the specified cost of projects proposed by the commission. As my colleague, the hon. member for Yukon has indicated, it is insurance that there will be enough revenues from the rates to pay for the projects.

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As the House may be aware, the original theory here was that this should be a self-sustaining commission. That theory endured until this minister, or whoever drafted the bill, and we cannot be sure that we should blame him, introduced this legislation which would take away the insurance that the rates would meet the costs of the projects.

We have to bear in mind that already today we have weakened the restraints on the Northern Canada Power Commission by removing the requirement to report to the