

Northern Canada Power Commission Act

But beyond that, what about the north? What about the Mackenzie system, a river system which provides a moderately inexpensive means of transportation right to the Arctic for three, four or five months of the year, depending on what part of the system navigation is being engaged in during those months? I am sure that Northern Transportation officials, a Crown agency operating in that country, will bear me out when I say there has been a very substantial deterioration in the capacity of that basin to carry traffic because of the Bennett Dam. What was done by the Province of British Columbia, illegally and improperly, has caused, is causing and will continue to cause a very serious situation by reducing the level of the water with regard to the possibility of transportation. This is something at which the government and the people of Canada must look.

Is there enough water flowing down that system to provide for additional power production and still maintain a reasonable means of transportation in the months during which navigation can be pursued in the spring? In addition to that, what about the ecological damage? I pressed the government on this. I asked the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry (Mr. Davis) about this, and also the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chretien). I have received no answer.

Events, Mr. Speaker, have a habit of overtaking us. We may well find that the commission may make recommendations to the government concerning future projects in that country, and decisions will have to be made. If what I am told about future development in the north in respect of gas, oil and other things is correct, then we may find that time is not with us. We have not got that much time. I suggest it is incumbent on the government, without any further delay, to establish a commission of inquiry composed of scientists, of people from the north and of people in public life, to examine this issue so that a decision may be arrived at within a reasonable length of time as to the extent to which the waters of the northern territories, particularly of the Peace, the Athabasca and Mackenzie systems, including the Great Slave Lake and the Slave River, may be utilized for power production and/or for transportation.

I make this plea in a nonpartisan way. Time will not wait for us. Because of the great demand, both in Canada and in the United States, for increased production of power, of natural gas, oil and other minerals, there may well be a very considerable acceleration of development in the north. That happened when the government of the Right Hon. gentleman from Prince Albert decided to proceed in 1957-58 with the very wonderful project of the roads to resources, and finally the Pine Point railway. We found that this opened up development and brought people and industries there at a rate that had never been anticipated. Now, this has been slowed down but, Mr. Speaker, there is every indication of it being revived, and revived in a very substantial way.

Before this comes about, there is a responsibility on the government to ensure that there is close and detailed examination of the potential for the development of power as related to the need of the waters for transportation, and in particular as related to the potentially very

[Mr. Baldwin.]

serious ecological damage as well as to the welfare and well being of the native peoples of the north. Probably this may be a little irrelevant, Mr. Speaker, but I point out that in the northern parts of this area there have been no treaties with the native peoples. Inadequate as the treaties are in other areas between native peoples and our government, in the northern parts of Canada there are no treaties at all. We have taken their lands; we have taken their forests; we have taken their waters. I submit there is a duty upon us, representing the people of this country, to make sure before any more damage is done that we have a good idea of what the situation is. With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, and so that this may be brought about I want to move now, in accordance with the time honoured traditions and precedents of this House, seconded by the hon. member for Saint John-Lancaster (Mr. Bell), that all the words after "that" be deleted and the following substituted:

"this Bill be not now read a second time but that the subject matter thereof be referred to the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development

Mr. Speaker: Is the House ready for the question? The hon. member for Gander-Twillingate.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Jerome: Mr. Speaker, may I rise briefly on a point of order? It has been the last speaker's habit on Thursdays, at the end of the question period, to ask for the order in which the government will continue to call its business, but understandably in his anxiety to participate in the debate today he overlooked doing so. As I indicated last night when the same question was asked, there was no intention to change the order at that time, but there has been a slight change in the order now. We would propose to follow this debate by going directly to Bill C-215, the Textile and Clothing Board measure, and thereafter to follow with the Crop Insurance Bill, then Bill C-207, the government organization bill, the Canadian National Railways financing bill, the statutory instruments measure and then, after that order, the Yukon minerals measure. Again, if any changes are to be made from that order we would endeavour to notify the opposition House leaders at the earliest possible moment.

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Speaker, because there had been this very momentous change, notice of which we received only today, I thought it better to wait until an announcement was made because it might well be that the government would have further changes to make.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that the CNR financing bill is fairly high on this list, can the Parliamentary Secretary indicate whether some agreement has been reached regarding the pensions of retired employees of the CNR? This would facilitate the handling of that bill.