

Northern Power Commission Act

Mr. Ross Milne (Peel-Dufferin-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to move:

That the motion be amended by deleting the words "four days" and that the words "twenty-four hours" be substituted therefor.

The amendment is being seconded by the hon. member for Skeena (Mrs. Campagnolo).

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): If the hon. member will direct the motion to the Chair in writing it will be put. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said amendment?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Amendment (Mr. Milne) agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion as amended?

Motion No. 1 (Mr. Nielsen), as amended, agreed to.

● (1600)

Mr. Nielsen moved motion No. 2:

That Bill C-13, an act to amend the Northern Canada Power Commission Act, be amended by striking out Clause 3, lines 10 and 11 at page 2 and substituting the following therefor:

3. Subsection 6(2) of the said Act is repealed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am afraid this motion will be more controversial than the last one. The existing legislation limits the power of the commission with regard to entering into any contract, undertaking, or project for maintenance of repairs, construction and so on, to \$50,000. If the commission should wish to enter into a project exceeding that sum then it must have the approval of the cabinet or the Governor in Council. By the amendment of the government—and I am speaking now of existing subsection 3 of section 6—subsection 2 with which I have no quarrel is removed, but subsection 3 is also removed and not replaced by anything.

This means in essence that the commission will not be required to seek and obtain approval of the Governor in Council in respect of any project, any construction, or anything it should decide to do. In other words, if this amendment should pass in its present form as contained in the bill, the commission could decide to embark in the Northwest Territories on the development of any hydro-electric scheme it so desired without the approval of anyone.

Having regard to the position taken by my colleague, the hon. member for the Northwest Territories, it would seem to me that this would be in opposition to the wishes of all the people in the Northwest Territories, and not merely the native organizations in that area. It would be in opposition to the wishes of the whole population, who are upset enough as it is now concerning the operations of the commission, particularly in the Mackenzie area. But that is what the amendment would do.

The amendment would give the commission carte blanche if it should proceed with the development of the Tulsequa Taku scheme which was investigated in the early 1950's by Montreal Engineering Ventures Limited and Quebec Metallurgical, a scheme which would envisage the expenditure of some \$3 billion, and which would be comparable in terms of hydro-electric power generation to

[Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain).]

twice the existing production of the St. Lawrence Seaway project. What this amendment in the bill means is that the commission could, on its own, make a decision to go ahead with a project of this magnitude without a by-your-leave.

I would have liked to have seen parliamentary control at some level over the commission in respect of expenditures. However, not being able to anticipate that kind of control of expenditure, at least I would have liked to have seen that kind of control exercised by the cabinet. That, however, is not to be. The deletion of subsection 3 from the existing legislation removes any control whatsoever from the commission with regard to any project it wishes to undertake.

I realize the argument will be made immediately that it can operate only within its existing resources and that it would not have sufficient funds to embark upon this kind of scheme painted by way of example by me just now. But the fact is that the power is there. In reading this bill I wonder whether the cabinet committee that was responsible for considering the legislation even had in mind that this extensive power would be given to the commission. I think not. Dealing as the amendment does with such mundane items as maintenance, repairs, construction, excavation and so on, I believe these words perhaps lulled into a sense of false security the cabinet committee which had the responsibility to consider this legislation.

It may be that my reading of the amendment and its effect is incorrect, but subsection 3 of the existing legislation sets forth quite clearly that the commission shall not, with respect to any project, undertake or enter into any contract, other than for maintenance or repairs, for the construction, making, erection purchase or installation of any works, excavations undertakings, equipment or facilities, involving a total estimated expenditure exceeding \$50,000 unless the undertaking of the project by the commission has been approved by the Governor in Council.

That is the way the section now reads. It was put in there, as explained in the debates of 1948 and 1956 when the act was originally passed and amended for the first time, for the specific purpose of cabinet having some kind of control over the activities of the commission. Now the government, by this amendment, wants to say in effect that the commission shall have, with respect to any project, the power to enter into any contract, the power to enter into any construction, and the power of making, erecting, purchasing or installing any work, any excavation, or any undertaking or any equipment or facility. That is the effect of the amendment in the bill. I do not think for a moment that any responsible cabinet, let alone parliament, would want to transfer that kind of wide and sweeping power to any agency of government without any parliamentary control.

It may be that parliamentary control exists in the fact that the commission must report to parliament through the minister. But what sort of control is that, because the financial operations of the commission are so altered by other amendments to this act that they permit it to compete actively on the money markets and raise any capital required in order to embark on any project?

It seems to me that we go far in excess of the limitations in respect of the parliament of Canada when we provide, by legislation such as this, for an agency of government,