

National Energy Board Act

involved in it. There were numerous Liberals from other parts of Canada and they were listened to with a great deal of sympathy.

I take issue with the whole thrust of the hon. member's bill. Indeed, it became evident to me in Vancouver that the confrontation is not one of east versus west, but one of hinterland versus urban centre. The hon. gentleman for Calgary Centre has espoused the cause of the rural ridings of Canada. The speakers who took part in that conference were not only from the Northwest Territories, the Yukon and the rural ridings of western Canada: there were some from urban centres, but predominantly they were from rural areas. They indicated their displeasure at the absence of any government policies on those measures which would be helpful to the rural and undeveloped areas of Canada. Indeed, the arguments presented were very similar to those I have presented a number of times with regard to problems that affect my constituency in northern Ontario. The arguments and subjects discussed were the same as those discussed by most members in this House last week during the debate on the suspension of the application of the electoral boundaries legislation. The questions of freight rates, immigration, industrial development—

● (1720)

An hon. Member: Decentralization.

Mr. Blais: I agree. All these matters were drawn to the attention of all delegates. It was as though they were at a meeting in North Bay, where the same topics are discussed. It becomes evident there has to be decentralization. The hon. member is right. His arguments are proper; there is no question about that.

However, I suggest that the decentralization should not be from one hogtown to another. I do not have anything against Calgary or Edmonton. They are gems on the Canadian panorama. They pale in comparison to the marvellous Rockies, being only human creations, but they are still more beautiful than most cities throughout the world. However, I would be sorry indeed if we were to find ourselves in a situation where Calgary and Edmonton replaced Toronto and Montreal as far as the centre of economic interest is concerned. I would feel that the future of my children would thereby be frustrated.

I believe decentralization should take place when the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Jamieson) announces the government's position and policy to decentralize these services. He will be dealing with decentralization not from one city to the next but from one city to those areas that are the subject and object of the government's policy. I would be disappointed if the minister selected the city of Toronto as being the provincial region or provincial headquarters for the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. By the same token, I would be very upset if he selected Calgary as one of the centres.

A great deal of argument was presented relating to the fact that Edmonton is the provincial seat. There is another lobby going around. Perhaps my friend is not aware of the lobby whereby Edmonton wants to be the seat of the National Energy Board. I do not know how it will be determined. Evidently everyone from that area belongs to

[Mr. Blais.]

the same political party. There is going to be a saw-off at some point. Perhaps the chairman will be from one city and the vice-chairman from the other. It is argued that because Edmonton is the seat of provincial power, it should also be the seat of the National Energy Board. We forget the National Energy Board is responsible to the federal government, not to the provincial energy board. There is one in the province of Alberta. I have no objection to where they want the provincial board to sit, but this should not include the National Energy Board.

The policy of this government with reference to energy has been to act as an arbitrator. The government has been accused of not having a national energy policy. It has been argued it has not yet formulated a national energy policy because there are too many facets to be determined. One important problem presently facing the government is the position between two competing provinces—Ontario which is highly industrialized, and Alberta where the major source of presently used energy resources is to be found. These two warring provinces are not at each other's throats but they are at least shaking hands very hard. I suggest the position of the Alberta government, with justification, is to seek to protect the provincial interest. No one will deny Premier Lougheed's right to protect the provincial interests of Alberta in contemplation of the better national good, but surely his prejudices lie with the province of Alberta. If the seat of the National Energy Board were in Alberta it would be subjected to massive influences from these areas. We would be in a sorry state indeed.

I remind the hon. member for Calgary Centre that we are in Ottawa as a result of competition between two major centres to be the seat of the Canadian House of Commons. In her wisdom, Queen Victoria chose Bytown. When disposing of these seats of power we must remember that power is multifaceted and is exercised in many ways. The National Energy Board is undoubtedly one facet of federal power. If we were to seat that board in Calgary Centre, undoubtedly its decisions would greatly influence the national energy policy. It would not favour that policy to the advantage of Canada as a whole.

I am very sympathetic toward decentralization. I hope that eventually this House will be able to sit in various areas in Canada. We may come to that position if we develop our northland to the stage it ought to be developed. At the present time, I feel the National Energy Board should not be subjected to this sort of step. I will point out why. Of all the boards, it is the most mobile. Section 6 of the act provides that the board may determine to sit at any place it deems desirable or necessary. It can also delegate to any one of its five members the full powers of the board. As I understand it, the board has sat more often in areas outside Ottawa than in Ottawa. Perhaps I am wrong on that. I have the figures. At any rate, the board has made it a practice to travel from one place to another in order to hear representations. Whenever the interests are regionalized, it travels to that particular region to hear representations.

● (1730)

It may be the hon. member has a point. It may be it would be advantageous to do as he suggests if we were dealing only with oil and gas. But we are dealing with