

Feb. 27th.

RURAL HYDRO ACTS GET SECOND READING FOLLOWING DEBATE

Hon. John R. Cooke Praises Government for Its Effort

CROSS-AISLE CRITICISM

Farmer Not Yet Being Treat- ed Fairly, It Is Claimed

Long and involved discussion on the rural Hydro situation, a debate marked by the interjection of personalities and cross-fire between Hon. John R. Cooke, Hydro Commissioner, and members of the Opposition, resulted in the Ontario Legislature yesterday afternoon when second reading of two Government power bills was proposed.

These measures, introduced recently, provide for the bonusing of rural Hydro so that the service charge is reduced to a maximum of \$2.50, and for the setting aside of money for service in the rural power districts. This power rate is effective from Jan. 1 last, Mr. Cooke explained, though the bill is not yet legislation.

Though Wednesday in the Legislature is usually "private members' day," an occasion on which Government orders are not brought up, the power bills were called, and Hon. Mr. Cooke, with a bundle of data, gave his annual Hydro address.

Opposition Complains.

Opposition members complained that had they known this would be the procedure they would also have had on hand facts and figures to throw into the debate. Premier Ferguson offered to have the debate adjourned, but several of the Opposition went on to discuss the Hydro situation in a general way, without statistical references. Then the first bill of the two, "the Rural Power District Service Charge Act, 1930," was given second reading.

Premier Ferguson immediately called for second reading of the second bill, "the Rural Power District Loans Act, 1930." William E. N. Sinclair, Liberal Leader, protested that one section of the bill, referring to the Hydro Commission priority claim on money used in the rural power work, was most unfair. "Why," said he, "should the Commission ask that debts against a man be superseded by something that he subsequently buys?"

Mr. Cooke replied that this point could be amended in committee. But Charles Robertson (Liberal, North Huron) and Hon. Harry C. Nixon (Progressive, Brant County) wanted to speak to the bill, and so, with the time being 5.50 p.m., the bill was held over for debate on another day.

Mr. Cooke's presentation of the Government legislation and his views on the rural power situation came in the form of a lengthy oration and then a series of remarks interjected into the speeches of the Opposition members. As in past years, he eulogized the Ferguson Administration and hurled brickbats at the Drury regime.

In Four or Five Years.

Speaking of the bill to bonus the rural districts that were not self-sustaining, he forecast that "the legislation will establish confidence so that in four or five years Ontario will be completely electrified."

Thirty per cent. of the districts are not affected by the bill, being self-sustaining, and he had foreseen that in a year another 30 per cent. would be self-sustaining. Still, in that year, he observed, power districts would extend so that there would yet be much need of the bonus system.

Mr. Cooke engaged in several clashes with Liberal members. William Newman (Liberal, North Victoria) maintained that the Hydro Commission should undertake an educational campaign to interest farmers in the use of Hydro. Mr. Cooke retorted that the Opposition members might well do that educational work.

"Well," said Liberal Leader Sinclair, taking a hand in the discussion, "why don't you put it over as a non-political enterprise rather than on the party platform in your campaign?"

Mr. Cooke wanted the House to understand that he had stated that he was not painting the picture with political color.

Tremendous Investment.

Mr. Cooke declared: "The problem of rural Hydro is not electrical. It is a question of the tremendous investment necessary in transmission lines to take the power out to the rural districts."

He explained at length that the density of the customers governs the difference in service charges. And then, after references to the percentage rate of the service charges in ratio to the cost of \$2,000 a mile per rural mile, he declared that, all in all, the Ferguson Government had made "remarkable progress" in extending Hydro to the farmers.

A survey of conditions in the Province, said he, would show a sufficient number of possible Hydro users in 75 per cent. of the Province to have eight or nine on each rural line. If all these prospective customers would co-operate with the Commission and take the service, there would be no need for the bill under discussion.

Mr. Cooke continued to speak at length about the development of legislation affecting the power situation. He declared proudly that the climax now came with the present Government giving bonuses so that the maximum service charge would be but \$2.50 a month. Hamlets will also benefit, he stated, with a charge of \$1.35.

Mr. Nixon asked what would be the expenditure under the legislation in the next year. Mr. Cooke replied that no such estimate could be made, but that, on the conditions of last year, the cost would have been \$73,000.

The Hydro Commissioner continued to eulogize the Ferguson Administration for making "a free gift" of over \$6,000,000 to rural Hydro in the last six years.

Mr. Nixon, continuing the discussion, referred to Hon. Mr. Cooke as "a political war horse." The Minister's remarks, he continued, involved some political bias. "And," he declared, "he even went so far as to impute motives to honorable members that are not deserved."

The former Drury Cabinet Minister resented Mr. Cooke's denunciation of that regime. At least, said he, the Drury Government "broke the ice" in preparing for grants to rural power users. And, said he, the \$425,000 for power extensions in the first year of the Ferguson Administration, and for which the Fergusonites claimed credit was charged in the Drury debt. It was advanced as ordinary expenditures, he noted, but then the bookkeeping system was changed and the other power grants were put down in the capital account.

In Effect From January.

In reply to a question, Mr. Cooke stated that the \$2.50 rate "is in now from Jan. 1."

"How is it, then," Mr. Nixon said,

"that on my own bill last month the service charge was \$2.78?"

"If the honorable member read his bill carefully," Mr. Cooke replied, "he would see that there is a 10 per cent. discount for cash, which would exactly make it \$2.50."

And a gale of laughter followed this answer.

When Mr. Newman took up the discussion the Hydro Minister again rose for some remarks, so that the Liberal member referred to "another speech from the honorable member."

Mr. Newman declared that the farmers object to the 20-year contract. He urged the Government to make it easier for the farmer to get into the power system.

John A. Sangster (Liberal, Glengarry) told the House that the people in the eastern section of the Province felt that they were not being treated right in power matters. Though, said he, they were surrounded by power resources, that power was passing past them "to seven favorite counties" in Central Ontario. He protested against Ontario becoming "an adjunct to the power barons of Quebec."

F. W. Elliott (Liberal, North Bruce) referred to the battle between the Hydro and the Foshay interests. After six years, said he, Hydro offered the Port Elgin-Southampton district a power rate of \$61, and yet six weeks later, at the time of the controversy, the Hydro offer was reduced to a \$40 rate. The explanation of this new low offer, said he, was "that there was a different hook-up."

"But," said he, "there was no change in the rivers, and no new development, so why was the hook-up not available sooner?"

The Government members were silent. The Opposition applauded.

As Mr. Elliott started to continue, the Speaker asked him "to speak chiefly to the bill."

"The Minister went all over Hydro," Mr. Elliott protested slightly.

Mr. Cook rose to say that Mr. Elliott would have ample opportunity for his remarks "on three or four or five other bills."

Second reading was then given the measure.