

Indexed as:

**British Columbia Electric Railway Co. v. British Columbia
(Utilities Commission)**

**British Columbia Electric Railway Co. Ltd., Appellant; and
The Public Utilities Commission of British Columbia, British
Columbia Lumber Manufacturers' Association, The Corporation of
The City of Victoria, The Corporation of the District of Oak
Bay, The Corporation of the District of Saanich, Corporation
of the Township of Esquimalt and City of Vancouver,
Respondents.**

[1960] S.C.R. 837

Supreme Court of Canada

1960: May 4, 5, 6 / 1960: October 4.

**Present: Kerwin C.J. and Locke, Cartwright, Martland and
Ritchie JJ.**

ON APPEAL FROM THE COURT OF APPEAL FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

Public utilities -- Case stated by Public Utilities Commission -- Matters to be considered by Commission in changing rates -- Order of priority to be given to factors considered -- The Public Utilities Act, R.S.B.C. 1948, c. 277, s. 16(1) (a) and (b).

The first of a series of questions submitted for the consideration of the Court of Appeal for British Columbia, in a case stated for the opinion of the Court, asked if the Public Utilities Commission of that Province was right in deciding "that no one of the matters and things referred to in clauses (a) and (b) of subsection (1) of Section 16 of the "Public Utilities Act" should as a matter of law be given priority over any other of those matters or things and that, if a conflict arises among these matters or things, it is the Commission's duty to act to the best of its discretion."

The question was answered in the affirmative. The appellant appealed from that portion of the judgment of the Court of Appeal which comprised this answer.

Held (Kerwin C.J. dissenting): The appeal should be allowed.

Per Locke J.: There is an absolute obligation on the part of the Commission on the application of the utility to approve rates which will produce the fair return to which the utility has been found entitled, and the obligation to have due regard to the protection of the public is also to be discharged. It is not a question of considering priorities between "the matters and things referred to in clauses (a) and (b) of subsection (1) of s. 16", but consideration of these matters is to be given by the Commission in the light of the fact that the obligation to approve rates which will give a fair and reasonable return is absolute.

Per Cartwright, Martland and Ritchie JJ.: The combined effect of the two clauses referred to is that the Commission, when dealing with a rate case, has unlimited discretion as to the matters which it may consider as affecting the rate, but it must when actually setting the rate, meet the requirements specifically mentioned in clause (b), i.e., the rate to be imposed should be neither excessive for the service nor insufficient to provide a fair return on the rate base. These two factors should be given priority over any other matters which the Commission may consider.

Although there is no priority directed by the Act as between these two matters, there is a duty imposed on the Commission to have due regard to both of them, and accordingly there must be a balancing of the interests concerned.

Per Kerwin C.J., dissenting: The statute does not require that any weight be given to the matters and things referred to in the two clauses after they have been considered, and therefore the weight to be assigned is a question of fact for the Commission to decide in each instance.

APPEAL from a portion of a judgment of the Court of Appeal for British Columbia [(1959), 29 W.W.R. 533.], comprising the answer to the first of five questions submitted to it by the Public Utilities Commission. Appeal allowed, Kerwin C.J. dissenting.

J.W. de B. Farris, Q.C., A. Bruce Robertson, Q.C., and R.R. Dodd, for the appellant;
J.A. Clark, Q.C., for The Public Utilities Commission of British Columbia, respondent;
T.P. O'Grady, for The Corporation of The City of Victoria, The Corporation of The District of Oak Bay, The Corporation of the District of Saanich and Corporation of The Township of Esquimalt, respondents;
R.K. Baker, for City of Vancouver, respondent.

Solicitor for the appellant: A. Bruce Robertson, Vancouver.

Solicitors for The Public Utilities Commission of British Columbia, respondent: Clark, Wilson, Clark, White & Maguire, Vancouver.

Solicitors for The Corporation of The City of Victoria, The Corporation of The District of Oak Bay, The Corporation of The District of Saanich and Corporation of The Township of Esquimalt, respondents: Straith, O'Grady, Buchan, Smith & Whitley, Victoria.

Solicitor for City of Vancouver, respondent: R.K. Baker, Vancouver.

THE CHIEF JUSTICE (dissenting):-- Pursuant to s. 107 of the Public Utilities Act of British Columbia, R.S.B.C. 1948, c. 277, the Public Utilities Commission stated a case for the opinion of the Court of Appeal for that Province. The case was stated in respect of five questions but we are concerned only with Question 1 as, by order of this Court, British Columbia Electric Railway Company, Limited was granted leave to appeal only from that portion of the judgment of the Court of Appeal comprising the answer given thereto. That question is as follows:

1. (a) Was the Commission right in deciding as appears in the said Reasons for Decision of 14th July, 1958, that no one of the matters and things referred to in clauses (a) and (b) of subsection (1) of Section 16 of the "Public Utilities Act" should as a matter of law be given priority over any other of those matters or things and that, if a conflict arises among these matters or things, it is the Commission's duty to act to the best of its discretion?

(b) If the answer to question (1) (a) is "No", what decision should the Commission have reached on the point?

The Court's answer to Question 1 reads:

The Commission was right in deciding as appears in its Reasons for Decision of 14th July, 1958 that no one of the matters and things referred to in clauses (a) and (b) of subsection (1) of Section 16 of the Public Utilities Act R.S.B.C. 1948, chapter 277 should as a matter of law be given priority over any other of those matters or things and that, if a conflict arises among these matters or things, it is the Commission's duty to act to the best of its discretion.

At the conclusion of the argument the judgment of the Court of Appeal appeared to me to be correct and further consideration has confirmed me in that view. Reasons were given by Sheppard J.A. on behalf of himself and the other four members of the Court who heard the argument on the stated case. I adopt all that he said and would have nothing to add were it not for an argument presented on behalf of the appellant. Section 16(1) (a) and (b) read as follows:

16. (1) In fixing any rate: --

(a) The Commission shall consider all matters which it deems proper as

affecting the rate:

(b) The Commission shall have due regard, among other things, to the protection of the public from rates that are excessive as being more than a fair and reasonable charge for services of the nature and quality furnished by the public utility; and to giving to the public utility a fair and reasonable return upon the appraised value of the property of the public utility used, or prudently and reasonably acquired, to enable the public utility to furnish the service:

Mr. Farris submitted that the Court of Appeal had not taken into consideration the words in (1) (b) "The Commission shall have due regard.....and to giving to the public utility a fair and reasonable return upon the appraised value of the property of the public utility used, or prudently and reasonably acquired, to enable the public utility to furnish the service:". However, I am satisfied upon a review of the reasons of Sheppard J.A., relevant to Question 1, and particularly of the extract transcribed below, which is the substance of his reasoning upon the matter, that he did consider and apply these words. The extract reads:

A further inquiry is what weight should be given to the matters required to be considered by Sec. 16(1) (b) and particularly to the "fair and reasonable return". Under Sec. 16(1) (b), the Commission is required to consider "the protection of the public" and the "giving to the public utility a fair and reasonable return". Although clauses (a) and (b) of Sec. 16(1) require certain matters to be considered, they do not state what weight is to be assigned by the Commission. Consequently, the Statute requires only that the Commission consider the matters falling within Sec. 16(1) (a), namely, "all matters which it deems proper as affecting the rate" and those falling within Sec. 16(1) (b), namely, "the protection of the public" and "a fair and reasonable return" to the Utility. But the Statute does not require more, and does not require any weight to be given to these matters after they have been considered. Hence the weight to be assigned is outside any statutory requirement and must be a question of fact for the Commission in each instance.

Furthermore, as Mr. Clark pointed out, the Commission when dealing with the electric rates applications, had, under heading "III. -- A Fair Return", discussed that subject; and that in their reasons for decision with reference to the transit fares applications the Commission speaks "of the misunderstanding which arose from the recent decision on electric rates"; and that later, in the same paragraph, they said: "The 6.5% rate remains the standard of the fair and reasonable return to which

the Commission has due regard".

The appeal should be dismissed but there should be no costs.

LOCKE J.:-- The sections of the Public Utilities Act, R.S.B.C. 1948, c. 277, which must be considered in deciding the first question are quoted in the reasons of my brother Martland which I have had the advantage of reading.

The real question might have been stated more clearly had it asked whether as a matter of law a duty rested upon the Commission to approve rates which would produce for the appellant a fair and reasonable return upon the appraised value of the property used or prudently and reasonably acquired by it to enable it to furnish the service described in the Act when the fact as to what constituted a fair return had previously been determined by the Commission. This is the matter to be determined.

Some assistance in interpreting the sections of the Act is to be obtained by an examination of the earlier legislation dealing with the control of rates charged for electrical power in British Columbia.

The first statutory provision dealing with the matter appears in the Water Act Amendment Act of 1929 which appeared as c. 67 of the statutes of that year. This Act provided for the control of such rates and imposed upon a power company producing electrical energy by water power the duty of supplying electrical energy to the public in the manner defined. Power companies were required to file schedules of their tolls with the Water Board constituted under the Water Act, R.S.B.C. 1924, c. 271.

"Unjust and unreasonable" as applied to tolls was declared to include injustice and unreasonableness, whether arising from the fact that the tolls were insufficient to yield fair compensation for the service rendered or from the fact that they were excessive as being more than a fair and reasonable charge for service of the nature and quality furnished.

Section 141B authorized the Board upon the complaint of any person interested that a toll charge was unjust, unreasonable or unduly discriminatory to enquire into the matter, to disallow any rate found to be excessive, and to fix the tolls to be charged by the power company for its service or respecting the improvement of the service in such manner as the Board considered just and reasonable.

Section 141C read:

Every power company shall be entitled to a fair return on the value of all property acquired by it and used in providing service to the public of the nature and kind furnished by such power company or reasonably held by such power company for use in such service and the Board in determining any toll shall have

due regard to that principle.

Section 141D read in part:

In considering any complaint and making any order respecting the tolls to be charged by any power company the Board shall have due regard, among other things, to allowing the company a fair return upon the value of the property of the company referred to in Clause 141C and to the protection of the public from tolls that are excessive as being more than a fair and reasonable charge for services of the nature and quality furnished by the company.

These amendments to the Water Act appeared as ss. 138 to 157 in the Revision of the Statutes of 1936 and these sections were repealed when the first Public Utilities Act was passed by the Legislature, c. 47 of the statutes of 1938.

It will be seen by an examination of the Public Utilities Act that in large measure the language of the amendments to the Water Act made in 1929 was adopted. The definition of the terms "unjust" and "unreasonable", which appeared in the 1929 amendment as part of s. 2, was reproduced in s. 2 of the Act of 1938. The prohibition against levying any unjust and unreasonable, unduly discriminatory or unduly preferential rate appearing as s. 8 of the Public Utilities Act merely expresses in slightly different terms the prohibition contained in s. 141B. The expression "shall have due regard" which appears in s. 16(1)(b) of the Public Utilities Act was apparently taken from ss. 141C and D.

The Public Utilities Act, however, did not, when first enacted, and does not now contain any section which declares in express terms, as did s. 141C of the Water Act Amendment Act, that the power company shall be entitled to a fair return on the value of its property. Had the present Act contained such a provision it appears to me to be perfectly clear that the answer to be made to the first question should differ from that given by the Court of Appeal. Whether its omission affects the matter is to be determined.

As it has been pointed out, the utility in the present matter is required by the Act to maintain its property in such condition as to enable it to supply an adequate service to the public and to furnish that service to all persons who may be reasonably entitled thereto without discrimination and without delay. It may not discontinue its operations without the permission of the Public Utilities Commission. The utility has, so far as we are informed, a monopoly on the sale of electrical energy in the Cities of Vancouver and Victoria and in my opinion at common law the duty thus cast upon it by statute would have entitled it to be paid fair and reasonable charges for the services rendered in the absence of any statutory provision for such payment.

I consider that, in this respect, the position of such a utility would be similar to that of a

common carrier upon whom is imposed as a matter of law the duty of transporting goods tendered to him for transport at fair and reasonable rates. This has been so from very early times. In *Bastard v. Bastard* [(1679), 2 Show 81, 89 E.R. 807.], in an action against a common carrier in the Court of King's Bench for the loss of a box delivered to him for carriage, in delivering judgment for the plaintiff it was said that, while there was no particular agreement as to the amount to be paid for the carriage, "then the carrier might have a quantum meruit for his hire".

In *Great Western Railway v. Sutton* [(1869), L.R. 4 H.L. 226 at 237, 38 L.J. Ex. 177.], Blackburn J. said in part:

The obligation which the common law imposed upon him was to accept and carry all goods delivered to him for carriage according to his profession (unless he had some reasonable excuse for not doing so) on being paid a reasonable compensation for so doing.

The result of the authorities appears to me to be correctly summarized in *Browne's Law of Carriers*, at p. 42, where it is said:

We have already seen that the law imposes very onerous duties, and very considerable risks, upon a person who is designated a common carrier. As to his duty, he is bound by law to undertake the carriage of goods. Another man is free from any such duty until he has entered into a special agreement; but the law holds that the common carrier, by the very fact of his trade and business, has, on his side, entered into an agreement with the public to carry goods, which becomes at once a complete and binding contract when any person brings him the goods, and makes the request that he should carry them to a certain person or place. To make such a contract binding upon him as a common carrier, it is not necessary that a specific sum of money should be promised or agreed upon; but where that is not the case, there is an implied undertaking upon the part of the bailor that the remuneration shall be reasonable.

The Water Act Amendment Act of 1929 appears to have followed closely the form of public utilities legislation in certain of the United States. There had been statutes of this nature in force in various parts of the Union for a considerable time prior to the year 1929.

I do not find that the American statutes generally declared in terms as did s. 141C of the Water Act Amendment Act that a power company providing service to the public should be entitled to a fair return on the value of all property acquired by it and used in providing service to the public. This method, however, of establishing a fair and reasonable rate would appear to have been followed universally.

The authorities in the American cases are to be found summarized in *Nichols -- Ruling Principles of Utility Regulation*, at p. 49 -- where a passage from the judgment of the Supreme

Court of the United States in *Bluefield Water Works & Improvement Co. v. West Virginia Public Service Commission* [(1923), 262 U.S. 679.] is quoted reading:

Rates which are not sufficient to yield a reasonable return on the value of the property used at the time it is being used to render the service are unjust, unreasonable, and confiscatory, and their enforcement deprives the public utility company of its property in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. This is so well settled by numerous decisions of this court that citation of the cases is scarcely necessary.

In *New Jersey Public Utility Commissioners v. New York Telephone Company* [(1925), 271 U.S. 23 at 31.], Butler J. said:

The just compensation safeguarded to the utility by the Fourteenth Amendment is a reasonable return on the value of the property used at the time that it is being used for public service. And rates not sufficient to yield that return are confiscatory.

While without the provision made in s. 141C of the Water Act Amendment Act a power company compelled by the amendment to furnish electrical service on demand upon the conditions prescribed would in my opinion have been entitled to a fair and reasonable payment for such service, the Legislature, by s. 141C, defined the manner in which fair and reasonable rates should be established.

As I have said, the Public Utilities Act does not contain any provision which in terms declares the right of the utility to a fair return on the value of its property. It does, however, by the definition of the terms "unjust" and "unreasonable" adopted from the Water Act Amendment Act declare that these expressions include rates that are insufficient to yield fair compensation for the service rendered, and the Public Utilities Commission in the present matter have interpreted this in its context as indicating the yardstick to be used in determining the fair and reasonable return to which the appellant was entitled.

Under the powers given to the Commission by s. 45 of the Act the value of the property of the appellant used, or prudently or reasonably acquired to enable the company to furnish its services was determined as at December 31st, 1942, and since then has been kept up to date. On September 11th, 1952, the Commission, after public hearings, decided that until some change in the financial and market circumstances convinced the Commission that a different rate should be applied, the Commission would apply the rate of 6.5 per cent. on the rate base as a fair and reasonable rate of return for the company.

That decision remains unchanged and is not questioned by anyone in these proceedings.

In interpreting the statute, the position at common law of the utility after the repeal of the

sections of the Water Act must be considered. Had the statute imposed upon the appellant the obligation to furnish service of the natures defined upon demand, without more, it would have been entitled as a matter of law to recover from a person demanding service reasonable and fair compensation. It will not in my opinion be presumed that it was the intention of the Legislature to deprive a utility of that common law right.

In *Colonial Sugar Refining Company v. Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners* [[1927] A.C. 343 at 359, 96 L.J.P.C. 74.], the Judicial Committee said:

In considering the construction and effect of this Act the Board is guided by the well known principle that a statute should not be held to take away private rights of property without compensation, unless the intention to do so is expressed in clear and unambiguous terms.

In Maxwell on Statutes, 10th ed., at p. 286, the authorities are thus summarized:

Proprietary rights should not be held to be taken away by Parliament without provision for compensation unless the legislature has so provided in clear terms. It is presumed, where the objects of the Act do not obviously imply such an intention, that the legislature does not desire to confiscate the property or to encroach upon the right of persons, and it is therefore expected that, if such be its intention, it will manifest it plainly, if not in express words at least by clear implication and beyond reasonable doubt.

Subsection 6 of s. 23 of the Interpretation Act, R.S.B.C. 1948, c. 1, directs that every Act shall receive such fair, large and liberal construction and interpretation as will best ensure the attainment of the object of the Act. In my opinion the true meaning of the relevant sections of the Public Utilities Act is that a utility is given a statutory right to the approval of rates which will afford to it fair compensation for the services rendered and that the quantum of that compensation is to be a fair and reasonable rate of return upon the appraised value of the property of the company referred to in s. 16(1)(b).

The appellant in addition to the sale of electrical energy operates a public transportation system and sells gas and by an Order-in-Council made under the provisions of s. 15(1)(c) of the Statutes of 1938 it was directed that these three categories of service should be considered as one unit in fixing the rates. In the reasons delivered by the Commission upon the application to increase the rates for electricity, it is said that the appellant has never earned the approved rate of return and that the rates proposed by it, and which were not approved, would not enable it to do so even in respect of the electrical system alone.

Rates that fail to yield fair compensation for the service rendered are declared by s. 2 to be unjust and unreasonable as they were by s. 2 of the Water Act Amendment Act of 1929. The Commission is directed by s. 16(1)(b) to have due regard to fixing a rate which will give to the

utility a fair and reasonable return upon the appraised value of its property used or prudently and reasonably acquired to enable it to furnish the service. It is the inclusion of the expression "shall have due regard" which has led the Commission and the Court of Appeal to conclude that this means that allowing a fair return upon the appraised value is simply one of the matters to be considered by the Commission in fixing the rate. Clearly no such interpretation could have been placed upon this expression under the provisions of the Water Act in view of the express provisions of s. 141C, and with great respect I think no such interpretation should be given to it in the present statute.

The fair compensation referred to in s. 2 of the Water Act Amendment Act of 1929 referred, and could only refer, to an aggregate produced by tolls sufficient to yield to the power company the fair return on the value of its property to which s. 141C declared it was entitled. The fair compensation referred to in s. 2 of the Public Utilities Act is in its context, in my opinion, to be construed in the same manner. The Order of the Commission of September 11th, 1952, determined what that compensation should be. The rates to be put into force to yield such fair compensation, which, at least in the case of electricity, vary in accordance with the use to which it is put and the quantities purchased, are matters to be determined by the Commission. The direction to the Commission in s. 16(1)(b) to have due regard to the protection of the public from rates that are excessive as being more than a fair and reasonable charge for the services requires it, in my opinion, to approve rates which are in its judgment fair and reasonable having in mind the purpose for which the electricity is used, the quantities purchased and such other matters as it considers justify the approval of rates which differ for different users.

I can find nothing in this legislation indicating an intention on the part of the Legislature to empower the Commission to deprive the utility of its common law right to be paid fair compensation for the varying services rendered or to depart from the declared intention of the Legislature in the Water Act Amendment Act that such companies upon whom these obligations are imposed are entitled to have the quantum of such fair compensation determined as a fair return upon the appraised value of the properties required.

I do not think it is possible to define what constitutes a fair return upon the property of utilities in a manner applicable to all cases or that it is expedient to attempt to do so. It is a continuing obligation that rests upon such a utility to provide what the Commission regards as adequate service in supplying not only electricity but transportation and gas, to maintain its properties in a satisfactory state to render adequate service and to provide extensions to these services when, in the opinion of the Commission, such are necessary. In coming to its conclusion as to what constituted a fair return to be allowed to the appellant these matters as well as the undoubted fact that the earnings must be sufficient, if the company was to discharge these statutory duties, to enable it to pay reasonable dividends and attract capital, either by the sale of shares or securities, were of necessity considered. Once that decision was made it was, in my opinion, the duty of the Commission imposed by the statute to approve rates which would enable the company to earn such a return or such lesser return as it might decide to ask. As the reasons delivered by the

Commission show, the present appellant did not ask the approval of rates which would yield a return of 6.5 per cent. to which it was entitled under the Order of the Board.

I do not consider that Question (1) can be answered by a simple affirmative or negative. The obligation to approve rates which will produce the fair return to which the utility has been found entitled is, in my opinion, absolute, which does not mean that the obligation of the Commission to have due regard to the protection of the public, as required by s. 16(1)(b), is not to be discharged. It is not a question of considering priorities between "the matters and things referred to in Clauses (a) and (b) of subsection (1) of s. 16". The Commission is directed by s. 16(1)(a) to consider all matters which it deems proper as affecting the rate but that consideration is to be given in the light of the fact that the obligation to approve rates which will give a fair and reasonable return is absolute.

In my opinion the answer to be made to Question (1)(a) is that the Commission was wrong in deciding that it was not required to approve rates which in the aggregate would produce for the utility the fair return which by its order of September 11, 1952, the Commission found it to be entitled or such lower rates as the utility might submit for approval. The duty of the Commission to have due regard to the protection of the public from excessive rates referred to in the first four lines of s. 16(1)(b) refers to the approval of rates according to the use to be made by the quantities supplied to those to whom the service is rendered.

The second part of Question (1) reads:

If the answer to (1)(a) is "No", what decision should the Commission have reached on the point?

As to this I agree with the answer proposed by my brother Martland.

I would allow this appeal but make no order as to costs.

The judgment of Cartwright, Martland and Ritchie JJ. was delivered by

MARTLAND J.:-- Pursuant to the provisions of subs. (1) of s. 107 of the Public Utilities Act of British Columbia, R.S.B.C. 1948, c. 277, the Public Utilities Commission of that Province stated a case for the opinion of the Court of Appeal of British Columbia. Five questions were submitted for the consideration of the Court, of which the first was as follows:

(1)(a) Was the Commission right in deciding as appears in the said Reasons for Decision of 14th July, 1958, that no one of the matters and things referred to in clauses (a) and (b) of subsection (1) of Section 16 of the "Public Utilities Act" should as a matter of law be given priority over any other of those matters or things and that, if a conflict arises among these matters or things, it is the Commission's duty to act to the best of its discretion?

- (b) If the answer to question (1)(a) is "No", what decision should the Commission have reached on the point?

Question (1)(a) was answered in the affirmative. The appellant, by special leave of this Court, has appealed from that portion of the judgment of the Court of Appeal which comprises the answer given by it to question (1). The other four questions and the answers given to them are not in issue in this appeal.

The relevant circumstances involved are contained in the case stated by the Public Utilities Commission and are as follows:

The appellant and British Columbia Electric Company Limited (together called "the Company") are related companies and between them own and operate equipment and facilities for the transportation of persons and property by railway, trolley coach and motor buses and for the production, generation and furnishing of gas and electricity, all for the public for compensation.

The Company is regulated by the Public Utilities Commission of British Columbia (called "the Commission") pursuant to the provisions of the Public Utilities Act.

By appraisal the Commission ascertained the value of the property of the Company used, or prudently and reasonably acquired, to enable the Company to furnish its services. The appraisal was made as of December 31, 1942, and since then has been kept up to date. The appraised value is referred to as "the rate base".

By Order-in-Council No. 1627, approved on July 16, 1948, the Commission was directed to consider the classes or categories of the regulated services of the Company as one unit in fixing the rates.

On September 11, 1952, the Commission after public hearing made "Findings as to Rate of Return" and decided that, "until changed financial and market circumstances convince the Commission that a different rate should be applied, the Commission will in its continuing examination of the Company's operations apply the rate of 6.5%" on the rate base as a fair and reasonable rate of return for the Company. This decision remains unchanged.

The Company from time to time amended its rate schedules with the consent of the Commission and filed with the Commission schedules showing the rates so established. On April 23, 1958, it applied for the consent of the Commission, under s. 17 of the Public Utilities Act, to file amended schedules containing increased rates for its electric service on the Mainland and on Vancouver Island. On July 28, 1958, it also applied for the consent of the Commission to file amended schedules containing increased transit fares for its transit systems in Vancouver and other Mainland areas and in Victoria and surrounding areas.

Public hearings were held by the Commission and it handed down its decision with respect to

the electric applications on July 14, 1958, and with respect to the transit applications on October 30, 1958.

Briefly, the decisions of the Commission accepted the proposed rate schedules submitted by the Company, except that it refused to approve the proposed increases in the principal residential electric rates on the Mainland and on Vancouver Island. It directed that those rates be scaled down by approximately 25%. In its decision with respect to electric rates the Commission stated:

The Commission has therefore consented to the filing to be effective July 15th, 1958, of all the rate schedules submitted by the Company for the Mainland and Vancouver Island, as modified and supplemented by the Company during the course of the hearings on its application, except the residential rate schedules and Mainland Rate 3035 for industrial users.

The Commission has decided that the principal residential rate on the Mainland (Schedule 1109) and the principal residential rate on the Island (Schedule 1110 under which the principal divisions are Billing Codes 1110 and 1112) should be adjusted to yield not more than three-quarters of the additional revenue proposed. The adjustment must be applied primarily to reduce sharp changes in impact and lessen disproportionately large percentage increases in the consumption range of 60 KWH to 280 KWH per month. Comparable adjustments must also be made in some of the related special residential rates of lesser importance. Most of the relief would be given to the small residential user.

At the same time the Commission decided that further increases in the commercial and industrial rates to compensate for this reduction in the proposed residential rates would not be justified.

During the hearings it was contended by counsel for the Company that, the Commission, having determined on a fair and reasonable return to the Company, namely, 6.5%, the Commission should authorize rates which would yield that return, or whatever lesser return the Company's application requested for the time being. The Commission did not accept this contention and the rates which were approved by the Commission would yield approximately \$750,000 less per annum than those applied for by the Company would yield. The rates for which the Company sought approval themselves would not have yielded to the Company the full allowed rate of return of 6.5%.

The relevant portions of s. 16(1) of the Public Utilities Act provide as follows:

16. (1) In fixing any rate: --

(a) The Commission shall consider all matters which it deems proper as

affecting the rate:

- (b) The Commission shall have due regard, among other things, to the protection of the public from rates that are excessive as being more than a fair and reasonable charge for services of the nature and quality furnished by the public utility; and to giving to the public utility a fair and reasonable return upon the appraised value of the property of the public utility used, or prudently and reasonably acquired, to enable the public utility to furnish the service:
- (c) Where the public utility furnishes more than one class of service, the Commission shall segregate the various kinds of service into distinct classes or categories of service; and for the purpose of fixing the rate to be charged for the service rendered, each distinct class or category of service shall be considered as a self-contained unit, and the rates fixed for each unit shall be such as are considered just and reasonable for that unit without regard to the rates fixed for any other unit. If it is considered by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council that the rates as so determined might be inequitable or contrary to the general public interest, the Lieutenant-Governor in Council may direct that two or more classes or categories of service shall be considered as one unit in fixing the rate:

In the reasons given for its decision the Commission deals with the effect of clauses (a) and (b) of s. 16(1) and says:

With great respect, the Commission considers that although for this purpose the statutory duty of the Commission to have due regard to all matters which the Commission deems proper as affecting the rate might without any significant inaccuracy be described as the right of the Commission, and its statutory duty to have due regard to giving the utility a fair and reasonable return might without significant inaccuracy be described as the Commission's responsibility for giving the utility a fair and reasonable return, there is nothing in the Act to relieve the Commission in the case now before it from complying with the language of the Act and giving due regard to all those matters to which the legislature has directed the Commission to give due regard in fixing a rate. No one of those matters should, in the opinion of the Commission, be given as a matter of law priority over any other of those matters and if, as the legislature appears to have thought possible, a conflict arises among those matters, the Commission considers that it is its duty to act to the best of its discretion.

The Court of Appeal concurred in this view. The judgment of the Court [(1959), 29 W.W.R. 533 at 538.], delivered by Sheppard J.A., refers to this question in the following words:

A further inquiry is what weight should be given to the matters required to be considered by Sec. 16(1)(b) and particularly to the "fair and reasonable return". Under Sec. 16(1)(b), the Commission is required to consider "the protection of the public" and the "giving to the public utility a fair and reasonable return". Although clauses (a) and (b) of Sec. 16(1) require certain matters to be considered, they do not state what weight is to be assigned by the Commission. Consequently, the Statute requires only that the Commission consider the matters falling within Sec. 16(1)(a), namely, "all matters which it deems proper as affecting the rate" and those falling within Sec. 16(1)(b), namely, "the protection of the public" and "a fair and reasonable return" to the Utility. But the Statute does not require more, and does not require any weight to be given to these matters after they have been considered. Hence the weight to be assigned is outside any statutory requirement and must be a question of fact for the Commission in each instance.

From this decision the present appeal is brought.

To determine the intent and meaning of clauses (a) and (b) of s. 16(1) of the Act it is necessary to consider them in relation to the other provisions of the Act, with which they must be read.

Section 5 imposes upon a public utility the duty to maintain its property and equipment in such condition as to enable it to furnish, and to furnish, service to the public in all respects adequate, safe, efficient, just and reasonable. Section 7 prevents a public utility which has been granted a certificate of public convenience and necessity or a franchise from ceasing its operations or any part of them without first obtaining the permission of the Commission.

Section 6 requires every public utility, upon reasonable notice, to furnish to all persons who may apply therefor, and be reasonably entitled thereto, suitable service without discrimination and without delay.

Sections 38, 42 and 43 contain provisions whereby, in the circumstances therein defined, a public utility may be ordered by the Commission to extend its existing services.

These four sections last mentioned involve a statutory obligation on the part of a public utility to make capital outlays for extensions of its service. A public utility which operates in a rapidly expanding community may be required to make substantial expenditures of that nature in order to keep pace with increasing demands. It must, if it is to fulfil those obligations, be able to obtain the necessary capital which is required, which it can only do if it is obtaining a fair rate of return upon its rate base. The meaning of a fair return was defined by Lamont J. in *Northwestern Utilities, Limited v. City of Edmonton* [[1929] S.C.R. 186 at 193, 2 D.L.R. 4.]:

By a fair return is meant that the company will be allowed as large a return

on the capital invested in its enterprise (which will be net to the company) as it would receive if it were investing the same amount in other securities possessing an attractiveness, stability and certainty equal to that of the company's enterprise.

The necessity for giving a public utility fair compensation for the service which it renders appears in the definition of the words "unjust" and "unreasonable" in s. 2(1), which is as follows:

"Unjust" and "unreasonable" as applied to rates shall be construed to include respectively injustice and unreasonableness, whether arising from the fact that rates are excessive as being more than a fair and reasonable charge for service of the nature and quality furnished by the public utility, or from the fact that rates are insufficient to yield fair compensation for the service rendered, or arising in any other manner:

The word "service", which appears in this definition, is defined in the Act to include:

the use and accommodation afforded consumers or patrons, and any product or commodity furnished by a public utility; and also includes, unless the context otherwise requires, the plant, equipment, apparatus, appliances, property, and facilities employed by or in connection with any public utility in performing any service or in furnishing any product or commodity and devoted to the purposes in which the public utility is engaged and to the use and accommodation of the public:

These defined words appear in two sections of the Act which relate to the rates to be charged by a public utility.

Section 8, which is among a group of sections dealing with the duties and restrictions imposed on public utilities, provides:

8. (1) No public utility shall make demand or receive any unjust, unreasonable, unduly discriminatory, or unduly preferential rate for any service furnished by it within the Province, or any rate otherwise in violation of law; and no public utility shall, as to rates or service, subject any person or locality, or any particular description of traffic, to any undue prejudice or disadvantage, or extend to any person any form of agreement, or any rule or regulation, or any facility or privilege, except such as are regularly and uniformly extended to all persons under substantially similar circumstances and conditions in respect of service of the same description, and the Commission may by regulations declare what constitute substantially similar circumstances and conditions.

(2) It shall be a question of fact, of which the Commission shall be the sole

judge, whether any rate is unjust or unreasonable, or whether in any case there is undue discrimination, preference, prejudice, or disadvantage in respect of any rate or service, or whether service is offered or furnished under substantially similar circumstances and conditions. 1938, c. 47, s. 8; 1939, c. 46, s. 5.

Section 20, which empowers the Commission to determine rates, reads as follows:

20. The Commission may upon its own motion or upon complaint that the existing rates in effect and collected or any rates charged or attempted to be charged by any public utility for any service are unjust, unreasonable, insufficient, or discriminatory, or in anywise in violation of law, after a hearing, determine the just, reasonable, and sufficient rates to be thereafter observed and in force, and shall fix the same by order. The public utility affected shall thereupon amend its schedules in conformity with the order and file amended schedules with the Commission.

It will be noted that this section, in addition to the use of the words "unjust" and "unreasonable", also uses the terms "insufficient" and "sufficient" in relation to rates.

Both of these sections contemplate a system of rates which would be fair to the consumer on the one hand and which will yield fair compensation to the public utility on the other hand.

Section 16, the section with which we are concerned in this appeal, also deals with this matter of fairness of rates.

In addition, it spells out the method by which a public utility is to obtain fair compensation for its service; i.e., by a fair and reasonable return upon its rate base, which rate base, pursuant to s. 45, the Commission can determine by appraisal.

Section 16 deals with the duties of the Commission in fixing rates. Clause (a) of subs. (1) states that the Commission shall consider all matters which it deems proper as affecting the rate. It confers on the Commission a discretion to determine the matters which it deems proper for consideration and it requires the Commission to consider such matters.

Clause (b) of subs. (1) does not use the word "consider", which is used in clause (a), but directs that the Commission "shall have due regard", among other things, to two specific matters. These are:

- (i) The protection of the public from rates that are excessive as being more than a fair and reasonable charge for services of the nature and quality furnished by the public utility; and
- (ii) To giving to the public utility a fair and reasonable return upon the appraised value of its property used or prudently and reasonably acquired

to enable the public utility to furnish the service.

As I read them, the combined effect of the two clauses is that the Commission, when dealing with a rate case, has unlimited discretion as to the matters which it may consider as affecting the rate, but that it must, when actually setting the rate, meet the two requirements specifically mentioned in clause (b). It would appear, reading ss. 8, 16 and 20 together, that the Act contemplates these two matters to be of primary importance in the fixing of rates.

In my opinion, therefore, these two factors should be given priority over any other matters which the Commission may consider under clause (a), or any other things to which it shall have due regard under clause (b), when it is fixing any rate.

The second portion of question (1)(a) was as to whether, in case of conflict among the matters and things referred to in clauses (a) and (b) of s. 16(1), it was the Commission's duty to act to the best of its discretion. I have already expressed my view regarding the priority as between those things specifically mentioned in clause (b) and the other matters or things referred to in clauses (a) and (b). This leaves the question as to possible conflict as between the two matters specifically mentioned in clause (b).

Clearly, as between these two matters there is no priority directed by the Act, but there is a duty imposed upon the Commission to have due regard to both of them. The rate to be imposed shall be neither excessive for the service nor insufficient to provide a fair return on the rate base. There must be a balancing of interests. In my view, however, if a public utility is providing an adequate and efficient service (as it is required to do by s. 5 of the Act), without incurring unnecessary, unreasonable or excessive costs in so doing, I cannot see how a schedule of rates, which, overall, yields less revenue than would be required to provide that rate of return on its rate base which the Commission has determined to be fair and reasonable, can be considered, overall, as being excessive. It may be that within the schedule certain rates may operate unfairly, relatively, as between different classes of service or different classes of consumers. If so, the Commission has the duty to prevent such discrimination. But this can be accomplished by adjustments of the relative impact of the various rates in the schedule without having to reduce the total revenues which the whole schedule of rates is designed to produce.

Accordingly, it is my opinion that the answer to question (1)(a) should be "No". My answer to question (1)(b) would be that the Commission, in priority to any other matters which it may deem proper to consider under clause (a) and any of the other things referred to in clause (b) of s. 16(1), should have due regard to the two matters specifically mentioned in clause (b). In the present case, having decided that certain of the rates proposed by the appellant would impose an unreasonable burden upon certain classes of consumers, the Commission should permit the Company to submit alternative schedules of rates, which, while yielding approximately the same overall revenues, would eliminate the comparatively excessive impact of those classes of rates to which the Commission objected, until a rate schedule is devised which meets the requirements of clause (b) of

s. 16(1).

In my view the appeal should be allowed, but no costs should be payable.

Appeal allowed, KERWIN C.J. dissenting.