

National Energy Board Act

the hon. member's question on Monday and not on Tuesday, as I inadvertently stated.

In answer to the question which has just been asked by the hon. member for Trinity, may I tell him that the report which appeared in the press this morning is purely speculative, and that there is nothing to report on this matter at the present time.

AIR TRANSPORT**REPORTED CHARGE BY MINISTER OF ASSOCIATION MONOPOLY**

On the orders of the day:

Mr. D. M. Fisher (Port Arthur): I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Transport, based on the announcement by the president of the Canadian air industries transport association that an emergency meeting of the association is to be called in April in order to consider the minister's charge that this association or its members are interested in maintaining a monopoly. Is the minister giving any consideration to elaborating his anti-monopolist views at this particular meeting when it is held?

Hon. George H. Hees (Minister of Transport): No, Mr. Speaker.

NATIONAL ENERGY BOARD ACT**AMENDMENTS RESPECTING GAS TOLLS AND EXPIRY DATES OF LICENCES**

Hon. Gordon Churchill (Minister of Trade and Commerce) moved the second reading of Bill No. S-26, to amend the National Energy Board Act.

He said: In directing the attention of the house to this important bill amending the National Energy Board Act, I think it is only appropriate that I should make some explanation as to why this measure comes before us at this time.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Would the minister allow me to intervene for a moment for the purpose of securing attention? I know that some hon. members leave the house at this time when orders of the day are reached, but would they kindly do so as rapidly as possible; otherwise it delays our getting on with the proceedings.

Mr. Churchill: I was saying that it would be appropriate to make an explanation as to why this bill is brought forward at this time rather than earlier, and I should like to do so at this stage in order that there may be no misunderstanding. I do not want anyone to think there is any hidden motive behind our action in bringing forward at this particular time a bill which is of some urgency in relation to the conduct of the affairs of

[Mr. Sevigny.]

the national energy board, and which affects a number of business enterprises in Canada. I know that no one in the House of Commons will make any reference to alleged default on the part of officials. The responsibility for delay in connection with this bill is mine and mine alone, and I have no intention of shifting it on to the shoulders of anyone else.

The national energy board drew my attention quite some time ago to the fact that in view of the number of applications for the export of gas which were coming to their attention it would be almost impossible to deal with the export licences in respect of electricity. There are 20 companies which have annual licences to export electricity from Canada. I recognized the fact that the energy board would be unusually busy in January, February and March, and consequently accepted their suggestion and had an amendment drawn to the National Energy Board Act which would permit these annual licences to be carried forward for a further period during which the board would be able to perform its proper function of having public hearings and considering each application on its merits, and either extending the licences again for one year, as has been done in the past, or for some further period.

That amendment was ready and I had intended to bring it to the house in the first week of February. In the interval the board, having been organized and having had an opportunity to study the act with greater care, suggested that there were other amendments which perhaps might be brought forward at this session of parliament. Consideration was given to these suggestions, and then it appeared that some of the proposed amendments would involve considerable discussion; and when it was obvious that the energy board was fully occupied with its gas export hearings I decided about the middle of February that we would be in a position to accept only one amendment in addition to the one I have already mentioned, and that is a small amendment to section 61 of the act which strikes out certain words.

Everything went all right up to that point, and there was still plenty of time to redraft the bill and bring it before the House of Commons; but somewhere at that stage there was a lapse of some sort. I have not bothered to fully investigate exactly what happened, but obviously I had not given clear instructions or the matter would have been dealt with. When I found out by the first of March that the bill was not available to the house I took immediate steps to rectify the error.

That, Mr. Speaker, is the sum and substance of the explanation for the delay in bringing this measure before the house. I repeat that I accept full responsibility for it,