

• (1220)

I indicated some of the fears that were being expressed by environmentalists were related to what would happen to James Bay, what would happen to the water, what would happen to the fish and fowl in the area. The minister has probably not had time yet to consider the project that was announced yesterday for the large lignite deposits in that area.

One of the major pollutants, of course, is coal and if a steam plant is established in that area for the development of thermal power for approximately a 20 to 25 year period using 200 million to 300 million tons of coal there is obviously going to be a lot of smoke and pollution. Anyone who listens to the weather forecasts is aware that much of the weather that affects northern Ontario coming out of the James Bay and the Hudson Bay area, goes through central Quebec, central Ontario and ends up in the central United States. A project the size of the one at James Bay is going to be one of the nation's largest polluters and this weather picture should be given some consideration.

Mr. Chairman, I am concerned that the Minister of the Environment does not seem to be taking into consideration work done by other bodies. The Department of Mines for the province of Ontario, our own Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and some other agencies as well as the many universities, have undertaken studies on this subject. It has been known for hundreds of years that lignite exists in that area, and I am sure that many companies and universities have made studies of it. The Ontario government has made at least five studies. I am sure the environmental effect has been considered in all of them. I feel that this government should make all these studies available to the people of the area who could then decide whether to go ahead with the project.

When the Churchill Falls project was developed, obviously more hydro became available than the province of Quebec could use and the surplus was for sale, but that did not affect Canadians. The only work derived from a hydro project is in its construction and all the mess is then left. The plant is automated to the extent that one man comes in by helicopter to check the dials and see that all the red lights are off and all the green lights are on and that is all it takes to run a multimillion kilowatt per hour plant. All that is left in the area is destruction or perhaps some small advantages attendant upon the construction.

I am not sure if anybody knows whether the minister is responsible for the mess that is left. According to his argument he cannot establish water standards for Canada under the Canada Water Act; they must be set by the regions or provinces and there is not a Canadian water standard as such. He gave a number of constitutional reasons why he could not set the standards and he gave a number of economic reasons why he would not if he could.

The last very large hydro project to be built in northern Ontario was in my area. They not only cut all the trees but they put in bulldozers to clean the land. In addition, they built a lake that was to be used for a number of other purposes. In that part of the country there are areas that were flooded by lumber companies almost 100 years ago,

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and today the trees are almost the same as they were two or three years after the flooding. It was a disaster and will be for many years to come. Some members have had an opportunity to see a film of an area in British Columbia in which the trees were standing in water. They have been there now for some years, and it is predicted that they will be there for many years to come.

Does the minister have the responsibility to do something about the future environment of this nation? He has the responsibility for the Navigable Waters Act and, Mr. Chairman, very few hydro projects are possible unless they take place on navigable waters. The Navigable Waters Act is one of our earliest pieces of legislation and gives the federal government responsibility for the areas where hydro projects are constructed. I imagine that this minister will wait until the project is developed and then when nobody has cleaned up the area and we cannot get a boat through, he will tell us he did not have any authority to act. Mr. Chairman, he will not have the authority unless he tells members of this parliament exactly what the conditions are and what the economics will be. Then, we can make an honest decision on all the facts so that we do not have a calamity.

It is all very well for members to speak about the rights of Indians, Mr. Chairman, and those rights are very important. They are not only important to the Indians but to all Canadians. However, it seems to me there is just as much responsibility to tell other Canadians what is going to happen to the environment in the James Bay area as there is to explain how the Indians will be rewarded because they have to move out of the area. Frankly, that is all that is going to happen in that area. If the area is to be developed I think we must minimize the destruction that will take place. Canada does not need that project. It is like the Arctic oil reserves and other reserves—they are of no value to Canadians today. The value is in the sale of the product to another country. Is it now time, Mr. Chairman, that the minister assured this committee that he has used every tool available to the environmentalists to ascertain how we can get the maximum advantage from any development that takes place. In this way, future generations of this country would not have to pay the penalty for our selfishness and greed in wanting to make the biggest dollar from present day developments.

• (1230)

Mr. Davis: Mr. Chairman, I should like, briefly, to answer several questions raised by the hon. member for Timiskaming. Environment Canada has in its employ many of the top biologists in the country. It has entered into contracts on a number of projects on which we need environmental assistance, and is employing many of the environmental consultants in Canada. These are people who can assess the effect on fisheries, forestry wildlife, air quality and land values that major projects can have in the future.

The business of looking into the side effects of major developments is new, and the expertise in Canada, our competence in this field, is already strained to the limit. We are finding it difficult to obtain enough competent people to carry out more environmental impact assessments. These are assessments that the Canadian government must undertake to honour its policy commitments in