

Statement on Non-Discrimination Policy

Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) asked if the minister would undertake an investigation for the purpose of determining whether the government was guilty of having condoned discriminatory practices against Eskimos in the Panarctic project; second, whether the minister would ascertain the benefits or otherwise derived by Eskimos from the Panarctic project, and whether such persons have been affected by discriminatory practices.

The investigation of the possibility of discrimination against Eskimos by Panarctic was undertaken as promised by the fair employment practices branch of the Department of Labour.

● (2:40 p.m.)

The branch could find no evidence of discrimination against Eskimos practised by Panarctic Oils Limited. It is important to note that no Eskimo lives on Melville Island where the exploratory seismic survey work to find likely drilling sites was being carried on this summer, almost 600 miles north of the Arctic circle. Furthermore, this particular highly technical exploratory work is carried on by United Geophysical, and only highly skilled technicians and personnel can be used.

The government has a commitment from Mr. Godfrey, vice president of Panarctic Oils Limited, that Panarctic will employ as much native help as possible as this project develops. This point was stressed on several occasions by the former minister of Indian affairs and northern development in negotiations resulting in the setting up of this company, and only recently the present Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development sought and received assurance from Panarctic on this particular commitment.

As proof of Panarctic's co-operation with the government, arrangements have been made for six Eskimos to be brought south to undergo training this fall and winter for work on the crew of the first oil drilling rig which is scheduled to commence operations around February 25, 1969. It should be noted that a drilling crew normally consists of about 20 men, of which at least half must be men with many years' experience.

The training course, in a drilling industry school, will be conducted under the auspices of the Alberta Petroleum Industries. It will commence on November 25 and will continue until Christmas. Arrangements are being made for further on the job training with

[Mr. Mackasey.]

actual drilling crews until the drilling company hired by Panarctic begins operations with one drilling rig late in February.

Mr. Godfrey also informs us:

In 1969 it is likely that a further geophysical program will be conducted and we are presently discussing with the geophysical company the possibility of training some Eskimos this winter for work in the Arctic in 1969. As the tempo of Panarctic's program increases, we sincerely hope to employ as many local inhabitants as we are able to qualify for employment.

I wish to assure the hon. member that I have instructed the fair employment practices branch to continue to investigate the situation in the far north in the coming months, in co-operation with all other appropriate government agencies. We must ensure that discrimination in any form against the native population, in employment or in training, whether studied or merely due to negligence, shall not take place.

The affirmative action to which the Panarctic Oils Limited group is now committed is commendable, and a model for employers in the north.

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West):

I am pleased the minister has seen fit to give me a reply to the question which was asked of him. I should just like to put this house on notice that we must at all times be concerned about the grievances which are now coming to light every day among the different segments of this vast community. At no time can we afford to let these grievances lie dormant, because while lying dormant they can become aggravated and when it becomes necessary to find solutions the task is much more difficult, if indeed it is possible to find solutions.

I am pleased also to hear the government reaffirm the policy under the northern development program which was instituted during the Diefenbaker régime. One must keep in mind that the Eskimo has proven himself adaptable; he has shown evidence of this at Rankin Inlet. We must continue to encourage his acquisition of further mechanical skills, because the Eskimo is adaptable by nature and capable of becoming a great productive force. I therefore trust the minister will see to it that this program continues to be of benefit to the Eskimo population, and that the Eskimos take advantage of it to the greatest possible extent since in the long run this will be to the advantage of all Canadians.