

Natural Resources—Development

another matter. That program is needed, but we are just about ten years too late in going after it.

This afternoon the Leader of the Opposition talked about the development of a national energy board; and of course, being a good politician, he said that idea came from his particular party, that the late Gordon Graydon advocated it in 1951 and Mr. Drew in 1953. The hon. member has been in this house as long as I have, and he will recall that I initiated discussions on that particular question as far back as 1941 and that I moved a motion in this house on April 17, 1946, not only advocating that national energy policy but setting out the mechanics that should be used in bringing it about. That was before the setting up of the dominion coal board as it exists today.

I am mentioning that fact just in order to keep the record straight. I have always had the opinion that in this world you can get anything you want provided you do not care who gets the credit for it. If the Leader of the Opposition had not raised that matter this afternoon and obviously pinpointed it in order to lead people to believe that any of these ideas had come from just one source, I would not have mentioned it. But I am setting the record straight by telling him that from a time going back to 1941 I have been advocating a national fuel board and a national energy policy in this house.

I am glad to see that we are making progress in that field, and I am glad to see there are some people in the government somewhere who have the good judgment to pick up things, no matter from where they come. I am reasonably sure that within the foreseeable future—maybe before this house closes—you will have an announcement that the kind of thing you are advocating by way of a national energy policy will be brought into being. I think that a departmental committee that has been sitting for several years now within the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys has gathered just about all the information and data necessary to bring about that national energy board; and I want to say that it is badly needed.

A moment ago I said I was going to tell the government some things that I thought they could do. One of those things is the setting up of that board. They can do that. It is within the power of this government. But whether or not this government has the authority to do the kind of job that board should do remains to be seen. That will depend largely on the provinces also.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Did the hon. member place the resolution before the house? I refer to the one he mentioned. Was it on a fuel policy?

[Mr. Gillis.]

Mr. Gillis: A national fuel policy. The field has broadened since then. You now have oil in it and you have atomic energy. I said I was doubtful whether the kind of board that is visualized will have the authority to do the kind of job it should do. The Leader of the Opposition suggested that, with the mechanics of confederation as they are today, with control of fuel in the hands of the provinces, it is going to be necessary to deal with the provinces on the question of a national fuel board. They are going to have a big say in it. The companies which have the resources leased out today and can develop them or not, just as they see fit, still have them leased from a provincial government and not from the federal government. If that board is just going to be the kind of board that can suggest and plead, without any power of regulation, then I think that board is not going to perform the function it should perform.

When I talk about energy I am particularly interested in the energy that is produced in my own province. I am particularly interested in it because that energy—I refer to the coal industry—is the main base for the whole economy of that province. That industry is in fairly bad shape today, and in my opinion it requires some other body to bring some planning and some sanity to the management of it, if it is to survive.

In the last report of the dominion coal board—if any one wants to look this up it may be found at page 12—it is definitely suggested that the coal industry of that province is in bad shape. Of course the federal government has made money available for mechanization purposes and so forth. That was several years ago. During that period that action has not improved the industry very much. There has been the closing of several mines, with consequent unemployment. There have been five major disasters and several fires. I sometimes think that perhaps in the rush to secure production where it is not possible, the safety factor in those mines is being lowered to a point beyond that at which it should be maintained.

That is, of course, a matter that is in the hands of the provincial governments; but to date, in my judgment, they have not made a very good job of it. Whether or not the production targets that are being set by that industry can be met is something that remains to be seen. Most people in this house who have heard the matter discussed, particularly the Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys, will recall that back four or five years ago it was said to be just a matter of mechanizing these mines, and that was to bring about the millenium as far as coal was concerned. That has been done.