

Mackenzie Valley Pipeline

This would reduce our procedures to a ridiculous state. I say that we should argue the point in the usual way. None of us will be very long in his arguments, but the arguments are extremely important, not just to the question but also the rules and procedures of the House of Commons. We should not do it in any other way than the one I suggest, with the greatest respect to the Chair.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One of the points the hon. member just raised was the right of the official opposition to amend a motion. That right has not been taken away from them. Even if the amendment is out of order, this does not mean that his party is precluded from presenting another amendment. In this case I am ready, as I said, to listen to the arguments in the procedural debate, and I welcome them. I was just cautioning hon. members and making them aware of the fact that the longer the procedural debate lasts, the less time hon. members will have to debate the subject matter of the motion before us or even to debate the proposed amendment.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, it is still my determination to keep this as brief as I possibly can. In my first submission, although my friend, the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) may not have heard it, I said clearly that there is no objection to an amendment being put down to an opposition day motion. It is perfectly in order to do so. We have often done it.

● (1320)

An hon. Member: You'd better believe it.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): It has been done quite a few times. I point out that our amendments have not taken away what was there; they have added something to it. What is wrong with this amendment is that it introduces a totally new proposition which is not relevant to the motion. The motion asks for a decision on the question of supporting Mr. Justice Berger's recommendation that there be no pipeline in the Mackenzie Valley for at least ten years. The amendment strikes all of that and replaces it with something else. That something else may be good, bad or indifferent, but it is a totally different proposition which can be presented to this House only on notice.

The hon. member for Grenville-Carleton seems to be trying to make me give one of my long speeches, and I could do it but I have no intention of doing so. However, I have made the case, as I see it, that the amendment is a totally different proposition which can only be made on proper notice and is not in order as an amendment to the motion before the House today.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of precedents with which you should be aware, and I am going to present them so you can have an opportunity to study them. The rulings are dated March 16, 1971; November 3, 1971; June 1, 1972; June 4, 1973; and May 14, 1975. Out of those rulings certain guidelines have come forward. First, it is not proper to amend opposition motions to

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

provide for an entirely new debate. This would be supported by Beauchesne, section 203(3), which reads this way:

An amendment setting forth a proposition which is foreign to the proposition involved in the main motion is not relevant and cannot be moved.

That is the first proposition. The second is that one of the standards of judgment would be the relevance of the original notice for the motion to the proposed amendment. If people would not be prepared for debate on the amendment by being prepared for the original motion, then the amendment obviously brings in a totally new debate. This does not do that, in my respectful submission. Third, it is not relevant to reject an amendment simply because it makes it easy or difficult to support the original question. The fact that the mover of the motion cannot support the amendment does not make the latter irrelevant, in my respectful submission.

Those are the rulings. These three points are a matter of judgment for Your Honour, and I suggest that the amendment we have brought forward is neither irrelevant nor does it raise an entirely new question. It brings in a modification of the proposal—I have to concede that—and it is most unlikely that the NDP, certainly in view of its position of some months ago, could vote for that amendment. I can see that. But the question was, and remains, if and when a pipeline should be built along the Mackenzie Valley. That is the question. That is the issue in the motion put by the leader of the New Democratic Party, and that is the subject matter of the motion put by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark).

The NDP feels that only the Berger commission is relevant, and the NDP is ready to confirm its original viewpoint. We want to examine all the reports before deciding. That is the purpose of our amendment. Our amendment is not an expanded negative, nor is it irrelevant to the motion. It interposes a necessary stage before the decision is made, but the focus of the decision remains exactly the same.

Mr. Goodale: You are not serious.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): That is the situation. Let us think about it for a second. Anyone arguing the wisdom of endorsing Berger now without further consideration must, of necessity, address himself to the substance of the amendment, the need or lack of need for a study of other reports or recommendations. It is not my object to cause anyone—and I do not think there is any need—to change his or her speech in this debate, and I therefore feel that the amendment does not change the question we are dealing with when it proposes a relevant modification. That is the issue.

This matter is not merely one of procedure; it is a matter of ethics, and I think this is important to the operation of this House. Opposition days are divided among the opposition parties in strict proportion to numerical strength in this House, except on that basis the official opposition gets a day less than it ought to. Hon. members who have anticipated in this point of order may have noticed that the official opposition has not amended another party's motion for two years. We came to the conclusion that it is not right to give another party the choice of accepting an irrelevant amendment or wasting its