

Oral Questions

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, quite apart from the hon. member's reference to President Carter and the Prime Minister, I have stated that the intention of putting a motion on the order paper with respect to pipelines was to provide the House with an opportunity to express its views from time to time before final decisions were taken. That is still my view and my commitment. I realize the practical difficulty that I may have in carrying forward that commitment, but in this case I am encouraged that my commitment can be fulfilled because of the tardiness and slow passage of legislation in this House and that probably we will be here all of July.

● (1430)

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, irrespective of whether the present legislative program keeps the House in session until August, surely the minister's commitment that parliament will have the final veto power on any decision to build a pipeline requires the additional commitment that if parliament is not sitting at that time—in the month of August and prior to September 1—that parliament will be called into session in order to express its views on the decision which the government has made. Can we have that commitment, otherwise the minister talking about triple veto power is absolutely meaningless?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I agree. On the triple veto scenario I posed, what the hon. member says is perfectly right. A decision taken by the National Energy Board and by the government has to be approved or rejected by parliament. It would be inconceivable that such a project can be undertaken without the specific approval of parliament. That is a view I repeat today.

I am not as certain how I relate the passage of legislation to the ongoing events that may take place in the summer—the keeping of the House and the recalling of the House. That was something that was very much in my mind and which had to be considered when I made my statement last Friday. I do not know the practical answer, but the principle still stands.

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REGIONAL ECONOMIC EXPANSION

DATE OF SIGNING AGREEMENTS WITH BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion and it is related to the very serious unemployment situation which has doubled the national average both in northeastern and northwestern British Columbia. Having regard to the fact the agreement between the province and his department was signed and has never been implemented, and also having regard to the announcement the minister just made that two subagreements have been signed, both of them merely to study an already intolerable situation, is the minister in a position today to give us a more precise date as to the signing of agreements which would address themselves to the serious situation in which several of the industries find themselves?

Can he tell us whether the umbrella agreement which was signed in 1974 is so out of date now that it does not really respect the priorities of the provincial officials?

Hon. Marcel Lessard (Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, no, certainly not. The agreement we signed with the province is not out of date because the basic potential of the province lies in the development of its resources. In those two recent subagreements we signed, there might not be a complete answer to some of the questions asked by the hon. gentleman. When one looks at what we have tried to achieve, one will see that it was to find the best solution for creating new jobs in those parts of the province of British Columbia.

The \$10 million being invested under the last agreement, although it is not a huge amount of money, is certainly going to go to the real potential of one resource of this province. One of the subagreements which we have under intensive negotiation right now is addressing itself to industrial development and as such will have a broad effect. We will try, with the province, to arrive at some kind of a strategy to promote the industrial development in some parts of the province, at least.

POSSIBILITY OF THREE FURTHER AGREEMENTS WITH BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Mr. Speaker, my question is not only supplementary to my previous question but supplementary to questions I have asked the minister and his predecessor since 1974. Would the minister confirm the fact that there are three agreements ready to be signed in British Columbia which would reflect the priorities of the British Columbia government and which would have been worked out with the encouragement of the federal department? Can he tell us what is holding up the signing of these agreements which would address themselves not only to the coal situation, which is now receiving another study, but also that of the wood converting industries and other industries in the area? I think he would agree there should be some dialogue with the senior minister in front of him so that we can finally get an answer to take home.

Hon. Marcel Lessard (Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, I hope the hon. gentleman will be in support of the agreement we are in the process of developing and will be in support of the two agreements we have already signed because they are likely to affect his regions. What we are discussing with the government of British Columbia is in line with the priorities set by that province. I am satisfied with what we will be trying to do together, and that is to support the best proposal we can obtain.

MEASURES TO PROVIDE ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY CLOSURE OF LABRADOR LINERBOARD MILL

Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct my question to the same minister, taking into account another intolerable situation which exists in the province of Newfoundland. I wonder if the minister is now prepared to make a statement on what