

*Environmental Screening of Federal Projects*

impact statement put forward by the proponent that anything will be made public. How are we to know whether the government, for its own purposes, will tell us everything that was in the initial statement? It is quite clear that if this is supposed to be an attempt to enlighten the public about considerations that have to go into the decision-making process before a major project with significant environmental impact is undertaken, it comes very close to being a fraud.

● (1410)

The minister is trying to give the impression that the public is going to be involved, but again it is only after an environmental review board is set up, which is permissive, not mandatory, that there may be public hearings. The fundamental difficulty in the policy the government is following is that it is still determined to pursue a process of secretiveness and of holding unto itself anything it does not want the public to find out about. This, of course, is based on the assumption that the government knows best. If the government knows best there is no need for environmental impact statements and there is no need to have public participation in the decision-making process.

Let me point out what the minister said in his statement. These words appear on page 4 of the statement the minister kindly gave me:

I hope, in the process, that we can avoid the delays and other pitfalls which a strictly legalistic approach would cause in this country. Our approach, I believe, is the right approach.

I should like to know what the minister means by "our approach". Does he mean the government's approach or does he mean the approach that was taken by the task force set up some time ago by this same minister to report to the government on the policy that ought to be followed with regard to environmental impact? The report of the task force is dated August 30, 1972, and the first policy position the report sets out is as follows:

The federal government shall offer leadership in the area of environmental impact assessment in respect of significant effects on the environment through the pronouncement and implementation of a policy and procedure to be based ultimately on legislation.

This is the exact thing the minister and the government have rejected. They do not want this to be mandatory; they do not want it set up in legislation. They want to have their own cosy little system of review, which means it does not matter how much in error they may be, or to what extent they are proceeding with something that is their political policy for the moment, the public is not going to get a look at it.

Recommendation no. 7 is as follows:

The policy shall provide for appropriate public information and participation in hearings and in reviews of statements.

How does this policy provide for that? I say again that I am quoting from the report of the task force set up by this minister, which was five months in the making and was highlighted by consultations with environmental experts of the United Kingdom, Holland, the United States, the other provinces of Canada and other federal departments.

I think I can sum up by quoting again from the front page of this report where it is stated:

The task force recognizes that there are alternatives to some proposals in this report.

[Mr. Fraser.]

We have had an alternative today. It goes on to state:

However, consideration of these alternatives may best await the decision on just how strong a stand the federal government takes on environmental impact assessment.

The stand the government has taken on environmental impact assessment is not strong. It is not going to work, it is in defiance of its own report, and is a fraud.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Randolph Harding (Kootenay West):** Mr. Speaker, I should first like to thank the minister for making a copy of his statement available to me before the opening of the House today. Our group welcomes this move by the minister to set up an environmental assessment review process as far as it goes. I agree with the last speaker that it certainly does not go far enough. But the mere fact that for the first time we are to have Crown agencies and federal departments go through the process of an environmental review is good. We have been advocating for years that where any project is carried out by the federal authorities, or by other agencies where there is partial federal authority, environmental impact studies should first be made and those studies should then be fully evaluated before any money is allocated for projects or a start made on projects.

An excellent example in this field is in the James Bay area. There have been several in British Columbia. The Columbia River was one and the Peace River Dam another. I could name a number of projects throughout Canada where environmental studies should have been made and evaluated before the project started. It is too late now. Immense damage has been done that can never be corrected regardless of what we do. Federal departments and Crown corporations will now be forced to make these studies. This is good.

But there are several weaknesses in the statement the minister made today. One is the fact that the Crown agency, or private firm given money to do a job for the government, will prepare its own environmental impact study. Whom is the minister trying to kid? All we need do is go into northern Canada where, under the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development we find that certain projects are under way, many of them being carried out by the minister's own department or let out by him to other groups, in respect of which we are not getting the protection in the northern part of Canada we should be getting.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Harding:** We have complained over the years about this kind of tactic and have urged that action be taken. I urge upon the minister that the very first department he tackle is the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development insofar as northern Canada is concerned.

For this reason that part of the statement which says that a private company or government department can carry out its own environmental impact study does not mean too much when one realizes that the minister's own department is the one which will assess the good or bad of the impact study. There is one bright spot. There could be some public input for the first time. The mere fact that