

Oral Questions

Mr. Nowlan: I was really hoping for something more from the Prime Minister. I listened to the Minister of Energy in this House last night when he tried to answer the hon. member for South Shore—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I will recognize the hon. member if he asks a question.

Mr. Nowlan: Madam Speaker, that is why I deliberately did not put my question on such a fundamental matter of government policy to the Minister of Energy—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Nowlan: —who was drawing a red herring as a diversion from the fundamental question involved.

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Nowlan: I will quote from the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*.

An hon. Member: A point of order. Get on to the next speaker!

Mr. Nowlan: No wonder you are not the minister of communications.

An hon. Member: No wonder you were never one.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Will the hon. member kindly ask his question forthwith, without any preamble. I have already allowed quite a long preamble on his first question.

● (1120)

Mr. Nowlan: Madam Speaker, I will direct a question either to the right hon. Prime Minister or his Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. I would like either of those gentlemen to tell me where my question differed, in terms of a fundamental promise made to Atlantic Canada, from what I am about to read, published by the Liberal Party of Canada in the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* on Saturday, February 2, quoting the speech of the Prime Minister to the Board of Trade.

There would be a natural gas pipeline to ensure all Canadians—

Not Canadians who live in any one part of the country.

—access to their resources. Liberals would take immediate action to begin negotiations for construction of a natural gas pipeline to Quebec City and the maritimes. Initially it would carry natural gas east but when maritime supplies are ready, the pipeline would be like a natural gas railroad with a return delivery facility as well.

Would the minister tell me where I misstated the facts?

Mr. Lalonde: Madam Speaker, I am glad that in his further question the hon. member indeed has changed substantially the quote he was attributing to the Prime Minister. He will see in the record tomorrow, if he looks at *Hansard*, that there is a substantial difference between what he has now said and what he said in his previous question.

In case he has any doubt, I will read to him what has been stated by the Prime Minister and quoted by his own colleague from Nova Scotia who was speaking in the House yesterday and who said, quoting the Prime Minister, that the Prime Minister said in Halifax that Liberals “would take immediate action to begin negotiations for construction of a natural gas pipeline to Quebec City and the maritimes.”

This we did when we took office. I have already been in touch with the provinces concerned, and I indicated in the House yesterday that indeed one of the problems that we had to face, and which has been recognized by the National Energy Board, is that the environmental studies required have not been carried out to the satisfaction of the National Energy Board.

Second, before finally proceeding to a decision on the building of the pipeline, it was advisable to assess the resources that are available in terms of natural gas off Sable Island, and the government of New Brunswick, as recently as last week at a meeting I had with the government of New Brunswick, insisted on the position it had taken before the National Energy Board to the effect that all alternatives should be carefully examined before we embark definitively on this project.

We are still of the opinion that the gas pipeline to the maritimes is still the preferred option of this government, but we want to do it in an orderly way and make sure that the consumers and workers of the maritimes and the maritime provinces concerned will all benefit from it.

Mr. Nowlan: Madam Speaker, my final supplementary is to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. No questions of environmental studies were raised when this matter was mentioned and promised by the Prime Minister in January.

My question to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, who raises environmental studies, is really twofold. Why is such a fundamental question of government policy, i.e., a pipeline to Atlantic Canada, even placed before the National Energy Board, since we all know it is feasible and will need financial help like the railways needed it back in the 1880s.

Also, since he has had other capacities in earlier governments in terms of moving oil across this country, and was at one time minister of federal-provincial relations, can the minister tell this House how, in Atlantic Canada, you can dilute an alienation factor that is there, as it is in other parts of the country, when Atlantic Canada looks to James Bay, which did not have an environmental study at all and now is on-stream and producing power, and when the Government of Canada today is using environmental studies for the first time, which could go on along with the pipeline study and would not have to be used as a scapegoat?

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Lalonde: Madam Speaker, I regret that the hon. member has to resort to such irresponsible statements as the one he has just made—

Mr. Andre: He is right on, and you know it.