

Trans-Alaska Pipeline

I remind hon. members that we should not overlook one additional danger in this area. We must keep in mind the pending underground massive nuclear blast by the United States which is scheduled to take place this fall in the northern Pacific. It will take place in a very prone earthquake zone not far from the shores of Alaska where it is planned to build a pipeline from the oil fields to the port for transshipment by tanker. In my view, this is an additional threat to the people on the west coast of Canada and the United States. It is evident that the matter of carrying oil, whether by sea or the alternative route by land through the Prairie corridor, is too important to be left to an industry, municipality, province or state. Indeed, oil and oil pollution, particularly with regard to the movement of vast quantities by water, is a global matter. We need international agreements as well as a clearcut, well-defined Canadian oil policy.

• (4:00 p.m.)

We must stop the threat to British Columbia, research the proposed pipeline corridor through the Prairies and bring under public direction and, in my view, under full public ownership this growing section of the oil industry. But the thought foremost in my mind, speaking as a British Columbian, is to do all we can to stop this plan to move the oil by water along the B.C. coast. It is the duty of the opposition to keep an eye on the government to see that it follows a course which puts people before the profits of industry.

Hon. D. S. Harkness (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, this whole question of the oil and gas reserves in the Arctic areas, both in Canada and Alaska, and the means by which they can be delivered to the market naturally divides itself into two main lines of consideration. One concerns the ecological dangers which the transportation of oil and gas involves, and the other relates to economic considerations—the cost, the effect on the people of the north and the ultimate benefits to people living on this continent.

In considering these questions there is no place for what might be called narrow nationalism. The only way in which the oil and gas reserves of the Arctic slope can be utilized to the advantage of Canada, the United States and the world as a whole is through close co-operation between Canada and the United States and agreement as to the best and most economic means of getting oil from these far-northern areas to places where they will be urgently needed in the years ahead.

Neither is there a place for what might be called highly-charged emotionalism in connection with ecological damage. The taking out of any natural resource inevitably causes a measure of ecological damage. This act needs to be realized. Some of the people who are completely sold on the idea of preserving the ecology would, it seems to me, prevent the exploitation of any of our natural resources if they had their way. We should avoid this attitude.

One thing which is certain in connection with the large amounts of oil known to exist in the Prudhoe Bay area, and the large amounts which will undoubtedly be found

[Mr. Mather.]

in the Canadian Arctic, is that they will be brought to market. The Americans will transport the oil from Prudhoe Bay for use in the United States and, to a lesser extent, in Canada. We must look at this question, then, from the point of view of deciding how the transfer of this oil and gas can best be done in a way which will cause the least possible damage and result in the greatest economic benefits for the United States and Canada.

It has been pointed out by government speakers and others that if the oil is transported by tanker from Alaska to the Seattle area a large oil spill is inevitable in the course of time. The whole picture of the transfer of oil by tanker shows that accidents occur with predictable regularity. No doubt widespread ecological damage will result to the Pacific coast of Canada and the north. In these circumstances, the only alternative is to take out the oil by pipeline through the Mackenzie valley. Perhaps the Canadian government has been slow in putting pressure upon the United States government to recognize that this is indeed the situation and to arrive at a scheme for bringing the oil through the Mackenzie River valley to the ultimate advantage of both countries.

As the minister has pointed out, the estimated cost of delivering oil to the large United States markets centred on Chicago would be appreciably less if the oil were brought out by pipeline, through the Mackenzie route, than if it were moved by sea. In considering this question I think a clear distinction should be made between oil pipelines and gas pipelines. There is urgent need for supplies of gas at the present time, and within five or ten years the need will probably be desperate. There is no question that a gas pipeline will be built.

The ecological damage likely to result from building a gas pipeline will not be very great; it will consist chiefly of the damage done to areas of permafrost directly involved in the construction and maintenance of the line. An oil pipeline is another matter. Unless a satisfactory means of constructing an oil pipeline over permafrost can be found, a certain number of breakages in the line will probably occur and spills of oil will have to be reckoned with. On the other hand, the damage done would certainly be much less than would be the case in the event of a tanker spill off the Pacific coast.

I do not believe most people realize that the Mackenzie River Valley route does not present nearly as many difficulties with regard to permafrost as does any other overland route, particularly the route from Alaska to Valdez. The tree line in the valley extends very much further north than it does in areas to the east and west. As a matter of fact, I think the permafrost extends only 70 or 80 miles south of Aklavik. From there on one is really out of the heavy permafrost area. The difficulties of building either a gas pipeline or an oil pipeline through the Mackenzie route are therefore very much less than would be involved in the case of any other route.

I agree with previous speakers who have described this subject as one of the most important to come before the House for discussion. But I do not believe we should mix basic considerations with the question of the way in which the pipelines are to be financed. For this reason I