

Government Organization Act, 1970

There is one question I should like to deal with in the limited time at my disposal this afternoon, namely, a national energy grid. The subject has already been touched upon by one or two speakers, but it seems to me it is one of the major fields which the government and the minister responsible have been neglecting.

I have in mind a grid which would cover Canada from the east to the west. This makes sense. We have been talking about the development of such a grid for years and we have every right to ask what is holding up this project, what the government is doing or what the minister and his department are doing to ensure that such a grid is set up.

We have just heard an interesting speech about the power which could be produced from the Fundy tides. The best way to use that power would be to tie it in to a national grid. As all hon. members know, across Canada there are a number of different time zones. They also know that when hydroelectric power is produced, there must be sufficient power to meet peak demands. This is why a national grid is a necessity. As peak times differ, loads could be switched from one region to another. We could save ourselves hundreds of millions of dollars in energy costs if we had the foresight to set up a national grid and pass reserve power from area to area as requirements change. Yet here we sit, in 1971, while the department does practically nothing along this line.

What is happening, Mr. Chairman? I will tell you. A north-south flow of power is developing. We are selling it over the line. Take natural gas, for example. Natural gas is one of the best energy sources we have, and it is one of the cleanest. We are fighting pollution. Instead of selling as much natural gas, as we do, south of the line, why should we not use it from one end of Canada to the other to produce clean electricity? This would help solve our pollution problem while at the same time using Canadian resources in our own country. The government's lack of policy in this direction is discouraging to those who have been trying for many years to move its thinking in this direction.

We have solved the technical difficulties attached to transmitting electric power over long distances. Other countries have done so. It can be transmitted from east to west and west to east.

An hon. Member: Really?

Mr. Harding: Yes. It is late because the north-south transmission of energy is taking place. It is late because governments such as the Liberal government which has been with us for years have not realized the immensity of the benefit which would accrue to Canada if more emphasis were placed on use within our own nation, and less on the export of natural resources, including energy resources in particular. I understand studies have been made on the basis of which an east-west grid is feasible. We have all heard stories about a mid-Canada corridor. Then again, hon. members say we ought to do something to arrest the population drift to the cities. They argue that the population should be spread out more evenly. It is predicted that within a few years 80 per cent of the

[Mr. Harding.]

population of Canada will be residing in the urban areas. Here is a chance to distribute industry and population and to develop other sections of this country. To achieve this end, of course, power and an east-west grid are essential. The lack of activity along these lines is detrimental to the nation generally. The previous speaker said that the Fundy power project is feasible. Some time ago it was estimated that if this project were in operation, \$100 million would be saved on the importation of coal from the United States. Incidentally, there would be less pollution. These are matters which the minister should take into consideration. It is well known that the most expensive power in the world is peak power, so if the load could be spread the cost would decrease. I sometimes wonder whether this aspect has been sufficiently surveyed. A great deal can be done to cut down pollution caused by energy resources, and to solve the problem of regions of low employment, and so on.

• (3:30 p.m.)

Another problem which I would like to deal with briefly, Mr. Chairman, is the projected pipeline from Alaska through northern Canada. Numerous questions have been asked about the amount of research being carried on in the north. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development have stated in this House that a great deal of research is being carried out. However, details have not been forthcoming. I am aware that some oil companies and some government departments have initiated research, but I doubt if much of it relates to the effect of oil spills upon fish and wildlife. The Minister of Fisheries and Forestry made an amazing statement in Victoria the other day at a convention of the Liberal party. He said, "I am 90 per cent sure that the building of a trans-Canada corridor can begin by 1972." From the information we have it is clear that it will take three or four years to gather sufficient knowledge to determine whether such a pipeline would be safe.

I ask the minister, what projects are afoot in the north to deal with the flora and fauna, who is doing them, who is in charge, where are they taking place? Surely the minister could give us this information right now or when he speaks in the debate. I assure him that if we do not get the answers we will keep after him until we do. I am of the opinion that a number of these projects have been agreed upon but that there is practically no research taking place. Yet the stories coming from the minister and the government generally are that we have almost enough information now to make the decision on whether the pipeline shall go forward.

Mr. Pepin: The minister has said the opposite.

Mr. Harding: We must think of all the factors before committing ourselves to any type of pipeline. It would be a disaster to find out that it would destroy the northern ecology. Blunders can be made, so we must endeavour to ensure that we proceed from the firm and sound basis of research. Mr. Chairman, I should like the minister to tell us what research is being done on the movement of cari-