

fact, already under way in the Department of Transport but in spite of the many questions directed to him day after day, the minister has never told us whether any preparation is being made on the basis of which the ministry can recommend a course of action under the terms of the Navigable Waters Protection Act. My colleague for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) is fully aware of the dangers of bypassing normal requirements in this type of application, and I am sure that he will have something to say on that score.

• (1420)

We are falling down somewhere, Mr. Speaker, when a group of Canadians finds it necessary to turn to an American consumer advocate for protection. If the fault has been in this House, then I hope we can do something about it today. The opposition has questioned the government constantly on the subject and they must be getting tired of these questions. But perhaps that is not good enough. If the government is at fault, and I suggest it is, then it is time it rectified the fault.

This House is a place where complaints about Canadian matters should be aired and settled by the government and the people's elected representatives. As I have already stated, I find it rather disgraceful that our citizens have to run to Americans to ask for protection. There has been no effort whatsoever to inform the public what is going on in the federal government with regard to this matter, if anything is going on. All the ministerial statements made in this House have been mumbled platitudes in order to get past the question period without saying anything, and I must say the government has been extremely successful. There have been no statements on motions, the traditional way of keeping the people of Canada and the House informed.

That is the reason I moved this motion yesterday, in the hope that the urgency of the situation would be evident. Urgency of debate is the basis for a Standing Order 26 motion. I am most gratified that the Chair accepted the motion so that this matter can be debated. I think the time has come for a clear and unequivocal statement on this project from the government, and I hope that as a result of this debate today we will receive it.

Mr. Randolph Harding (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to have an opportunity of speaking to the motion that is currently before the House regarding the James Bay development project. I must congratulate the hon. member who just spoke for bringing the motion before the House yesterday and the Speaker for his decision to allow this rather important debate. I feel it gives the members of this House an opportunity to discuss some aspects of this proposed development.

The federal government has some jurisdiction in the area to be developed, but to date we have received very little information from the departments concerned despite numerous questions and inquiries put by various members of the House. It is a bitter disappointment, to say the least, to realize that another major project is underway without adequate studies having been made to determine what its over-all effect will be on the natives in the area, the environment generally and, of course, the Canadian economy. No serious attempt has been made to find out

James Bay Power Project

whether the detrimental effects of the project, when added to its cost, will outweigh the advantages to be derived. This information is required before the project gets underway, and it is a tragedy that once again resource development on an immense scale is taking place without the over-all planning that is necessary in this day and age. It appears that the environmental blunders of the past will be repeated, and the federal government must take its full share of criticism for it has given poor leadership in this regard. Apparently the tragic effects of the Bennett dam on the Athabasca and Mackenzie deltas have been forgotten, and it is felt to be politically expedient practically to ignore the present project.

Our group is not opposed to hydro development; this must come in many areas of Canada. However, we suggest that these developments should be based on a thorough study of their full impact on the residents in the area, the environment and the economy. This study has not been done as far as the James Bay project is concerned, and we are requesting more action and information from the federal departments involved.

Perhaps I should place a few general facts on the record regarding this project to show how quickly it has come up and to indicate the lack of interest on the part of federal authorities. In April 1971, the Quebec government announced its plan to develop the hydroelectric potential of the James Bay area. In July 1971, the National Assembly of Quebec enacted legislation to establish the James Bay Development Corporation with the objective of promoting the development and exploitation of natural resources in that area. It is an immense project. Its final generating capability could be as high as 12 million kilowatts. It will cost about \$7 billion. The premier of Quebec claims that it will create 125,000 jobs. The decision to proceed with the project in such a rush is obviously a political one.

I have no doubt that the project is feasible on an engineering basis. It can be built. But whether the project should proceed is another matter. Engineers can estimate the cost of the project, the output of the turbines, the delivering of power to the market, etc. They never seriously consider the cost of environmental damage, the dislocation of people, the possible effect on our nation's economy, or the fact it might be another energy sell-out to the United States. For this is not the task of the engineers; they are primarily hired to plan for hydro development, and in this respect they do extremely well.

The previous speaker covered a number of topics and I should like to expand on several of them but will deal primarily with the environmental aspects of the project. May I again point out that this House has not been given full and proper information on the James Bay project by the departments involved. This is not good enough when we realize that there will be a major social impact on about 7,000 of our native people who live there. Questions have been asked of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien) about what his department is doing. The answer has been that negotiations are going on between the natives and the Quebec government. This answer is not good enough. Is he actively assisting the natives who have requested his help, or is he ignoring the claims of the natives, as he has done in the