

Oil and Gas Act

Mr. Randolph Harding (Kootenay West): I have listened with a great deal of attention to the motion which has just been moved and to the debate which has taken place on this bill today. I have a few comments to make on the bill in general and then possibly I will come back to the amendment a little later on.

● (2:50 p.m.)

Bill S-5 is an act to amend the Oil and Gas Production and Conservation Act. I see it as a further amendment to Bill S-29 which was passed last year. In fact as I recall it, Bill S-29 received royal assent on June 27, 1969. While I am on the subject, Mr. Speaker, I should like to comment on the lack of government action on Bill S-29. Constantly, we hear from ministers across the way that the House is being exceptionally slow in pushing legislation through. Here we have a fine example of legislation passed over eight months ago not being implemented. The government pushed for passage of this legislation; it had to go through in a hurry. But what happened? Regulations covering the drilling of oil were to be set up. I ask the minister responsible, where are those regulations at this time, eight months after the bill was passed. I will tell you where they are, Mr. Speaker. They do not exist. At least, they are not published. They may exist on paper to the extent that people in the department are working on them. Those people know what legislation is to be introduced and that regulations must be drafted in connection with the legislation to be passed by Parliament. Why then do we have to wait months and months for those regulations which give effect to the legislation? I say this constitutes a disgraceful approach to the problems concerning oil and gas exploration in this country.

The bill which was passed provided for the establishment of a committee relating to oil and gas matters. I know that several government supporters are unhappy about this delay in setting up the committee. Where is the committee? It does not exist because this lackadaisical, do-nothing government just has not put into effect legislation the House of Commons passed months ago. I resent this delay and we need only look around us to see its result.

We have problems in the north and problems all over Canada because the government has failed in its job of regulating the exploration and development of our natural resources. This should be done in an orderly and sensible way. It amazes me to see any

[Mr. Aiken.]

government in the world being stupid enough to give out permits covering tremendous areas for oil and gas exploration without having adequate safeguards that will regulate and protect those resources for the people of Canada. We see an example of this in the north. This is not a matter of trying to stop exploration; that is not my aim. We are trying to make the government realize that we must have an orderly and sensible approach to resource development. If we do not have that approach we will run into the same problems and troubles which have pestered the world for generations and will continue pestering it.

Let us take a look at what is happening in the north, for example. We have over 100 million acres of land in the Arctic islands under gas and oil leases; we have over 10 million acres of our Arctic waters under oil and gas leases. People want to go into the area and explore, and yet there is no proper set of regulations governing pollution in the Arctic. We are told by experts the world over as well as in our own departments that if there is a serious oil spill in the Arctic, tremendous damage will be done. Yet we have not even undertaken the necessary research in this area; we have not even undertaken research into the ecology that is absolutely necessary in order to be certain what measures ought to be taken in the event of an oil spill.

We must examine all possibilities. You cannot blame the companies for going into the area; they are looking for territory to explore. You cannot blame them if the regulations are not laid down and if they go ahead and search for oil and gas without them. After all, they are in that business. But, government departments concerned ought to know about the potential problems and what regulations will be necessary to meet those problems. It gripes me to think that we must wait for a dreadful disaster before we are prepared to move. That is why I think that, along with a bill of this sort, we ought to introduce regulations governing the companies undertaking this exploratory work in order to protect as widely and effectively as possible other resources which might be affected by oil pollution.

An excellent example of pollution from an oil spillage is to be seen on the east coast of Canada today, where the Liberian tanker *Arrow* went down. About one month ago, in an answer to a question I had placed on the Order Paper, I was told that the government