

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

[English]

ENERGY**NORTHERN PIPELINE—REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE STUDY OF BERGER COMMISSION REPORT OR DEBATE IN HOUSE**

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Acting Prime Minister. Last week I asked the Prime Minister whether he was prepared to refer the report of Mr. Justice Berger to the appropriate standing committee of the House. I did not receive a reply to that question. Today, the government will be tabling that report, and there is still no indication as to whether the government of Canada is prepared to let this parliament consider that report or wants to make that and other decisions in secret by executive fiat. May we have, from the Acting Prime Minister now, a clear undertaking that when the Berger commission report is tabled this afternoon it will be immediately referred to the appropriate standing committee of parliament?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I am not in a position to give that undertaking at the present time. I have already expressed my doubt as to whether it will be useful to conduct another inquiry in light of the inquiry that has been conducted by Mr. Justice Berger. However, I am ready to tell the Leader of the Opposition that it will be possible for parliament to deal with this report, at least to debate it. I have commenced, in a tentative way, discussions with my counterparts in the other parties seeking a way by which we may be able to debate, under a general motion, the Berger report and other developments that may affect a pipeline decision. It seems to me that putting the question before parliament or giving parliament, as a whole, an opportunity to comment on the report might be more meaningful than at this stage to establish another inquiry. It would be better for us, as early as possible, to have a debate on the subject and then take it from there.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, the Acting Prime Minister and his colleagues have had three weeks to consider what they were going to do about this matter, at least three weeks.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: The Acting Prime Minister now tells us that he does not think it would be useful, to use his words, for the parliament of Canada to play a role in looking into the recommendations which have been made by the Berger inquiry. He has suggested that instead there might be a debate of some duration, at this point unknown. May I ask the Acting Prime Minister if he intends to delay that debate in the House of Commons until after the National Energy Board has made a recommendation on matters relating to a northern pipeline?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I believe it would be very important, as early as possible, to have parliamentary spokesmen from various parties comment in the way they wish on the very important conclusions that will be contained in the Berger

[Mr. Speaker.]

report. It is not my intention to delay any such debate until after the National Energy Board reports. It may be that it will be useful to have a further debate after additional reports are received; but my intention would be to provide an opportunity for debate in the House of Commons which would give the parties and the individuals an opportunity to comment upon the conclusions that have been made by Mr. Justice Berger.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, the parliament of Canada is not interested in a role that reduces it simply to a commentator. The parliament of Canada wants the opportunity which lies at the root of the parliamentary process whereby members of this assembly representing the whole of the country might have an opportunity to discuss, in the detail necessary, the very important report that is going to be tabled this afternoon by Mr. Justice Berger. It is not adequate to have one day of debate as a replacement for committee study.

I would like to ask the Acting Prime Minister two things now. First, will he give us a commitment that there will be an opportunity for a committee of this parliament to consider the Berger report in the way it would consider other important reports? Second, will he give us a guarantee now that there will be an opportunity for the parliament of Canada, either in committee or preferably in a long debate in the whole House, to discuss this whole question after the National Energy Board has made its recommendation?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, briefly the answer to the first part of the question is no. I am not prepared to give a firm undertaking. The answer to the second part of the question is a qualified yes.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, we are now moving from the government saying nothing at all to giving us a qualified yes, which leaves the Parliament of Canada nowhere at all. We do not know what that means. Can the Acting Prime Minister tell the House of Commons how long a debate he is anticipating on the Berger commission report.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I hope to work out some arrangements with my counterparts on the other side of the House. It may be that we may all want to contribute some of the time available to us to deal with this important matter. On the part of the government, I am quite prepared to undertake that there will be a debate. I have not decided the length of the debate. I invite other parties perhaps to contribute some of their allotted days so that the debate can be useful and broad enough to provide input from all hon. members in the House.

Mr. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. Apparently the minister prepared a memorandum and sent it to Canadian Press with regard to certain energy matters. In that memorandum, the minister stated that he had informed the United States energy chief, James Schlesinger, in March 1977 and I quote:

Under certain circumstances we might be prepared to continue our exports at a rate of 250,000 barrels a day—