

*Canada Oil and Gas Act*

ment of those lands; that those lands and the resources that are there should be hived off to whatever regional or provincial governments there are. We as national parliamentarians and as the Parliament of Canada are too far removed, too weak, so short of imagination that we will not be able to ensure in those lands a regime that will benefit the people of the regions and all the people of Canada. We will not be able to have a regime which will ensure development and at the same time protect the environment and the rights and interests of others, such as the fishermen.

● (1620)

The solution of those opposite is to say: "Hive it off to the provinces; let the locally elected people in the regions run it, the national government cannot do it". That is not the view of this government. It is not the view for any proper national government of this country. In fact, there is not one federation in the world where the offshore resources belong to the regional governments, the provinces or the states, not one.

Members opposite are afraid to take responsibility for protecting the interests of Canada. They believe this should be up to the provinces, territorial governments or other groups. That is not our view. Our view is that those lands belong to all the people of Canada. The immense wealth that is there belongs to the people of Canada as a whole.

The Parliament of Canada is the guardian and trustee of the immense wealth which should be developed and protected in the interests of the people of Canada as a whole and the people of the regions concerned in particular. That is our view. That does not mean that this national government is not interested and concerned about a proper role and a proper share for the people in the neighbouring regions or the provincial or territorial governments of the regions where there are Canada lands. That is not our view. Over this past decade our view has consistently been that we want an arrangement with the provincial and territorial governments to ensure that there is proper development and that it is carried out on a co-operative basis.

It is the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) who initiated an agreement with the maritime provinces many years ago. The three maritime provinces agreed with the federal government on a regime for the development of offshore resources in the maritime provinces. What happened? The agreement which was arrived at voluntarily by the various governments was later cancelled by some provincial governments. Unfortunately, since then it has not been possible to arrive at another agreement.

It was not the federal government which cancelled the agreement. It had been willingly entered into by the four governments concerned. At a certain stage some of those governments withdrew their agreement. Since then we have consistently tried to work out an arrangement with the provinces concerned so that this development takes place on a co-operative basis. We continue to strive to arrive at such an agreement.

Any agreement has to take into account the rights and responsibilities of the national government for the people of Canada. We differ from the parties opposite because we believe that the people of Canada, through their national government, have an interest in this. Some members opposite say that the rate of development of the Canada lands should be left to the neighbouring governments. We disagree fundamentally in that regard. Do we want a situation where a particular province could block indefinitely the development of resources in the offshore areas or in the north while the people of Canada are importing oil and are unable to develop those resources that are needed for this country? Do we want a situation where Premiers could do with offshore resources on lands or waters which belong to the people of Canada what was recently done by the Premier of Alberta when he cut off production because he did not like the price?

When the resources belong to the people of Canada, would it be responsible to have a situation where the Premiers or heads of various governments could veto development? We do not agree with that. We want to arrive at arrangements where development is done on a co-operative basis, where the rights of the regions and the people in those regions are protected and at the same time the rights of the people of Canada are protected by their national government. That is our belief.

The notion that a particular region of this country could prevent the people of Canada from getting the benefit of resources which belong to them is one which we as a government cannot accept. In that regard we dissociate ourselves from the position of the parties opposite.

We have had meetings with some of the provincial governments concerned. I am sure there will be more. We have indicated that we are eager that provinces such as Newfoundland will be a major beneficiary of such development. As the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie) has indicated, that province is in a difficult economic position. It is one of the poorest provinces in this country. It is important that any development which takes place is done in such a way that it does not hurt the economy and social life of Newfoundland but ensures a dynamic society and economy for that province. That is the position of this government. That is the type of arrangement we would like to arrive at with the government of Newfoundland as well as those of the other maritime provinces, British Columbia and the governments in the north.

This does not mean that the courts have no role in this regard. I find it strange that some members would appear scandalized at the notion that the national government could go to court if there is no agreement on some issues with a particular provincial government. The provinces can take the federal government to court every day of the week. Those opposite find that quite normal. In fact, they think it is great if a province takes the federal government to court. I believe the same role should apply to both sides.

Sometimes there are honest disagreements between citizens of this country or between governments of this country. If you cannot work out a deal in a civilized society, the judicial system is asked to arbitrate and decide who is right and who is