Supply

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY, S.O. 62—NUCLEAR INDUSTRY

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. de Jong:

That a Royal Commission of Inquiry be created to study the nuclear fuel cycle in Canada including the range of economic, social, medical, environmental and safety matters resulting from exploration, mining, production, transportation, storage and use of uranium and its byproducts.

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be able to join in this debate today relating to the use of nuclear energy and uranium mining in this country. As the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Chrétien) noted this morning, we have not had a very large number of debates on this industry in the past several years. For many of us in this House, Mr. Speaker, this industry is very important in providing jobs and electrical energy for our communities and untold benefits to the country through exports. I want to comment on a couple of items mentioned by the Hon. Member for Regina East (Mr. de Jong) in his speech, but I will do that perhaps a little later.

● (1510)

Since 1946 this Government has supported the development of nuclear energy in this country through the development of the Candu reactor, the research programs carried out by Atomic Energy of Canada Limited and the development of the many uranium mines, both in Ontario and in western Canada.

It is interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that at this time nuclear energy is producing 11 per cent of Canada's electricity. By the year 1990 it will be producing 18 per cent of the electrical energy in this country. If we compare that with many countries in western Europe and with Japan we will see that their level of nuclear energy is much higher than ours. In the Province of Ontario, the most populous province of our country with nearly nine million people, 40 per cent of our electrical energy is now being produced by nuclear energy. By the year 1990 that will have increased to 50 per cent.

It is important to know that we have two prime sources of electrical energy in Ontario, nuclear and hydro. These two sources complement each other very well. The hydro source which often comes from small electrical generating plants, many of which are in my constituency of Algoma can be used for peaking power late in the morning and in the early evening when high energy use is required. The peaking power of the hydro is beneficial to complement the nuclear base load. Thirty per cent of New Brunswick's power is now generated from nuclear energy at the Point Lepreau development. Thirty thousand people in our country are now employed in the nuclear energy industry in mining, research and electrical generating plants. There is $1 billion worth of electricity generated from nuclear energy at the present time.

If we look around the world, Mr. Speaker, we see that electricity is increasing in use because of its cleanliness, efficiency and versatility. An increasing percentage of the electricity generated is from nuclear energy. France, Finland, Sweden, Belgium and Switzerland produce over 30 per cent of their electricity from nuclear energy. Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States all produce more of their electricity from nuclear sources than Canada where it is only 11 per cent. That will be rising to 18 per cent by the end of this decade. A recent report by the OECD countries indicated that the countries of western Europe and Japan could produce their electricity 30 to 75 per cent more cheaply using nuclear energy rather than coal as a source of energy by 1990.

Some 5,000 people are employed in the uranium mines in Canada. They produce about $800 million worth of uranium a year, 85 per cent of which is sent into export markets. Canada now produces about 20 per cent of the world's uranium.

The Hon. Member for Regina East (Mr. de Jong) suggested that the economy of the nuclear industry is very shaky. In my own constituency of Algoma we have had three major megaprojects constructed during the past five or six years. In the spring of 1982 there were some 85 megaprojects listed across the country. Three of those were in my constituency related to the nuclear industry. In Elliot Lake there was the massive development of the Rio Algom mines, an investment of some $400 million. At Denison Mines there was an investment of some $300 million. In Blind River there was the development of the Eldorado Resources Uranium Refinery, an investment of $130 million. These projects certainly did not do anything to make the nuclear industry shaky. They provided thousands of jobs during the construction period and will be providing jobs for many years to come.

In putting forward the motion by the NDP today I wonder whether the Hon. Member for Regina East was really just calling for a public inquiry into the uranium industry, or if in fact he was hoping for a decision such as was taken by the NDP convention two or three years ago to phase out the whole mining and nuclear cycle.

This nuclear fuel cycle is very important to our country. It provides over $1 billion worth of electricity per year. It provides 30,000 jobs. It is a very important industry. The Tory policy on further processing of our resources is interesting. Looking back at the 1980 election we recall a policy of the Liberal Party to process our resources further at or near the area where they are being produced. We were thinking at that time in terms of uranium processing in the areas of production such as the Blind River-Elliot Lake area. We were thinking about the further processing of petroleum resources in western Canada.

After the 1980 election we returned to power and reversed the decision that was made by the Tory Party to relocate the uranium refinery in Port Hope in southern Ontario to Blind River, the resource-producing area. A decision was made by the 1979 Clark administration to dispose of the waste from the uranium refining facility of Port Hope through the mining cycle in Elliot Lake, but actually to locate the refinery in