

led to social breakdown, to alcoholism, and even suicide. Now we want to change this. We want to retain control over our lives and take our rightful place in Canadian society. But we also want to be accepted on an equal footing.

● (1500)

As I have said many times inside and outside this House, we want to be accepted as native people, not as brown white men.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Firth: Who can say this is unfair? It is pretentious to say that so and so discovered the north. Our people have survived in the harsh environment of the north for a very long time. And when the white man came, we helped him and shared with him, as is our custom. I ask, should we now be forced to take a back seat? Most emphatically I say, no!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Firth: Our people, in great numbers and with essentially one voice, said it to Mr. Justice Thomas Berger. That point is extremely important, Mr. Speaker. He listened to our views, and was made aware of this sentiment. He was made aware of the fact that central to this feeling was the feeling of the people that they need to gain legal control of our land.

Please note that I used the word "legal." It is difficult for a native person to accept that he might not have control over land on which he and his forefathers have lived, hunted and fished from time immemorial. We native people realize that our destiny is tied to an important decision which must be made, the decision to settle the land claims of the people of the Northwest Territories, the land claims of the native population. We have always understood the value and worth of the land; perhaps we did not look at it in terms of ownership, as white society does. Now we are looking at it with different eyes. First of all we are now thinking of owning the land, which was not our concept in the past. We now realize that only if we own the land can we achieve the necessary control. Only that way can we control the direction of our lives and the direction in which we want our society to go. In this respect I suggest that we want no more than the rest of the Canadian population wants.

We also understand that in future we may take our wealth from the land in a manner different from that of the past. I do not think I can improve on the words of Mr. Justice Thomas Berger who said, on page 18 of his report:

Native society is not static. The things the native people have said to this inquiry should not be regarded as a lament for a lost way of life, but as a plea for an opportunity to shape their own future out of their own past. They are not seeking to entrench the past, but to build on it.

There are those who feel that the land claims could be settled even if the pipeline went ahead. I disagree. With the examples of James Bay and other examples behind us, the native people believe that land claims must be settled first. With this Mr. Justice Berger concurs. Frankly, given all the implications of the question, I fail to see how any fair minded person can disagree.

Mackenzie Valley Pipeline

Those who say we should proceed at once with a pipeline also argue that the economic development of the north depends upon such immediate action. With such a view, as well, I must disagree.

We need to look at some basic questions. What would be the real impact of the pipeline, in a purely economic sense? Certainly there is a lot of money involved. But in return for the incredibly large capital outlay, what are the long-term prospects? Aside from anticipated, increased exploration activity along the pipeline, which would add considerably to the environmental and social impact, what, I ask, would be the effect on substantial economic development? We must be realistic. It is proposed that the line will carry gas, and perhaps eventually oil, to the south, the implication being that no spin-off industries are to be expected. And what of the construction companies, hotels, restaurants, supermarkets and so on which could spring up? How many enterprises of such magnitude can we expect will be established? I agree with the words of Mr. Justice Berger, who said:

... the Mackenzie Valley pipeline could produce a serious distortion of the small business sector of the Northwest Territories. This would raise problems for the orderly development of regional, economic and commercial activity in the long run.

That is why I say we cannot afford to put blinkers on when looking at this proposal. We cannot and must not be short-sighted. There is far too much at stake. It would be an illusion—we would really be fooling ourselves—if we thought the pipeline would solve our economic problems.

Finally, I wish to state again my support for the recommendations against the building of the proposed Mackenzie Valley pipeline. Further, I wish to add my conditional support to the proposed Alcan route. I say conditional, because many questions must be considered. The main condition, of course, would be the settlement of native peoples land claims in the Yukon. So my support is conditional, since many questions affecting the area must be considered before a final decision can reasonably be made. However, my own initial view is that the Alcan route seems to be a more suitable solution. A gas pipeline can be built in Alaska; you could hook it up with a new pipeline to run through the Yukon, along the Alaska highway. Later on it might be feasible to run a pipeline from the Mackenzie Delta, along the Dempster highway, to tie in with the proposed Alcan gas pipeline, which could be used in future to move Canadian gas from the proven fields of the Mackenzie Delta. I suggest that the environmental impact of that proposal would be somewhat lower, and the infrastructure already exists along the proposed route for accommodating more conveniently the venture. However, I point out that even if we should move in that direction, many issues remain to be settled.

I want to see assurances that any pipeline built would not be built solely for United States interests. I want to see Canada maintain control over any such pipeline. Also, before any money is spent, I want to see some hard-nosed negotiations take place to ensure a good deal for Canada. Further, if the venture is proceeded with, I want to see a provision calling for a period review—say every five years or so—of any deal made