

Supply—Mines and Technical Surveys

the house, but it has been the practice to deal first with the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys and then the coal board. I do not know the wish of the committee, but perhaps it would be possible to dispose of the items that are under the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys and then refer to the dominion coal board.

Mr. Southam: I am sorry if I have transgressed any of the rules laid down, Mr. Chairman. If you wish me to reserve my remarks until some future time—

Mr. Martineau: Perhaps the minister would be agreeable, since the hon. member has already launched into his remarks, to allowing him to continue his discussion of this item.

Mr. Benidickson: I have no serious objection. I believe the hon. member for Kootenay West wants to say something about coal. I was just thinking about the possibility of disposing of certain items of the estimates, not for the convenience of myself but of the officials who are standing by.

The Chairman: Is the suggestion made by the minister agreeable to the committee?

Mr. Martineau: Several members have spoken on the subject and the hon. member who has the floor is quite advanced in his remarks. I think it would be better if he concluded.

Mr. Southam: I appreciate the help of the committee in this respect. I was glad to notice that on the order paper, under date of June 29, the minister has the following resolution:

That it is expedient to introduce a measure to amend the Coal Production Assistance Act to extend until the 31st day of October, 1969, the period during which agreements may be made under section 3 of the said act.

The amendment introduced to that act by the former minister in December 1962, proved of great value to the lignite industry in Saskatchewan, and no doubt to other coal producing areas, particularly where it had effect on the consecutive payment of loans. This part of the amendment was very beneficial, because rather than having to pay double indemnity, or 60 cents a ton, where they had two loans they could make their payments consecutively.

Earlier this session I was glad the Minister of Trade and Commerce stated the government would follow the previous government's policies with respect to a national grid system. If such a system could be developed at the earliest possible opportunity it would be

[Mr. Benidickson.]

of particular benefit to that part of Saskatchewan, which contains about 20 per cent of total Canadian coal deposits. With the thermal steam generation plants that could be developed, similar to the one developed by the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, that area could put into a grid system many million kilowatts of cheap power, which would enhance the economy of that part of the province. I know it is a question of technological development concerning the economical transmission of power over long distances, but I am sure the engineers will overcome this problem in the not too distant future.

In conclusion I wish to ask a specific question with regard to groundwater surveys in Saskatchewan. A great advance was made on this work under the previous government. It is work that is very important to Saskatchewan, as it is one of the more arid regions of Canada. The development and utilization of water is most important to our economy, something which has been evidenced by the many questions and debates on the water problem affecting eastern Canada this year. The Saskatchewan provincial government has been conducting widespread surveys. There is a lot of subterranean water in Saskatchewan, but the surveying and developing of it places quite a load on the province itself. The federal department should accelerate its program in this respect.

Mr. Benidickson: In answer to the hon. member's last question, this season in cooperation with the provincial government we had eight or ten workers dealing with the matter of sunken rivers and subterranean waters. There will probably be a paper available shortly, but the work is continuing.

The Chairman: Shall the item carry?

Mr. Benidickson: I still wonder if it would be possible for some of the mines and technical surveys items to receive the approbation of the committee, and leave other items open if necessary, items like 65, 70 and so on, that relate to the coal board. Would that meet with the approval of the hon. member for Kootenay West, who is always here?

Mr. Herridge: It just so happens that the hon. member for Kootenay West wants to hear the minister talk on the national coal board and the government's policy.

Mr. Benidickson: Having regard to the procedures in the past in dealing with these estimates, I have not with me the officials concerned with the dominion coal board. It has been traditional that we deal with the