

*James Bay Power Project*

too far to stop or cause a major upheaval in provincial plans in the future.

We have seen in the past several months a major failure in policy development on the part of this government. It has been apparent for over a year that decisions of major proportion would have to be made. If the government, by chance, had overlooked this fact, it has been reminded of it day by day and week by week as a result of questions asked in this House. Every single question, Mr. Speaker, has been passed off, has been answered in vague terms, indicating that neither any of the ministers of the government nor the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) himself knew what to say.

• (1410)

The project itself is of major proportion. The size of territory to be developed is 200,000 square miles containing 10 energy rivers and 6,000 Indian people who hunt and fish. The energy potential of this area is of the order of 85 billion to 97 billion KWH per year; this amount of energy is approximately three times the output of Churchill Falls. Total cost estimates range from \$5 to \$7 billion of which 60 to 70 per cent is expected to come from outside Quebec. Diversion of rivers will leave the lower 90 miles and 81 miles of the Nottaway and Broadback rivers dry. At least 50 miles of the Opinaca, 20 miles of the Eastmain and 230 miles of the Great Whale river will be dry or have a greatly reduced flow.

There are three major areas of direct federal responsibility in the proposals to develop the James Bay project: (a) interference with and relocation of Indians who are residents of the area; (b) altering the course of navigable waters protected under the Navigable Waters Protection Act; (c) effect upon the total Canadian environment. There are also other areas of federal concern. Export of the power produced is one of them. And of even more concern is the effect of the required financing on the Canadian dollar. On none of these matters has the federal government expressed an opinion.

I turn now to the environmental problems. A federal-provincial task force has looked at the situation and has issued a preliminary report. This report is far from reassuring. The report indicates, according to evidence given in the Committee on Resources, Public Works that "no catastrophic effects" would be apparent resulting from the carrying out of the project. Mr. Speaker, what is catastrophic? Perhaps the task force had in mind certain predictions that the weight of the accumulated water on one-quarter of the surface of the Province of Quebec would cause breaks in the earth's crust and result in earthquakes and possible alteration in the rotation of the earth. This would be catastrophic, and the task force has decided this will not happen. But almost anything short of that can.

Some of the other environmental dangers have been outlined as climatic repercussions—a longer winter—alteration of water flows and currents in James Bay; possible destruction of shoreline vegetation and drowning of forested areas. I understand that areas to be flooded will not be first stripped of trees. There are dangers to waterfowl and wildlife. Yet, there is still no indication of the manner in which the extent of these dangers is to be

evaluated. The task force was admittedly a preliminary manoeuvre, but it did not study these factors in depth.

The Minister of the Environment (Mr. Davis), in common with other ministers who have been questioned in the House, has given us no idea how he proposes to deal with these problems, of how he intends to deal with any threats to the environment. Hydro Quebec has apparently made some fairly complete studies of the project but no information has been made available; indeed, as far as we know, results have not been conveyed, even to the Department of the Environment. I stand to be corrected if such is not the case. In any event, the studies by Hydro Quebec have not surfaced for reviewing by the general public.

It is not necessary to view the James Bay hydro development in a negative way. It is a tremendous undertaking and undoubtedly it possesses great possibilities in the area of development, the exploitation of mineral and forest products, the on-site construction of mills, the realization of gigantic power potential and, temporarily at least, major employment prospects. Sadly, the federal government has not even responded to these positive factors with any enthusiasm. It has failed to respond at all. If this project is to succeed it must go ahead on the basis of sufficient study of the dangers involved and the chances which are being taken. Herein lies the shortcoming of the federal position. The federal government has failed to carry out needed research and has given no indication whether such research in depth will, in fact, be undertaken. Perhaps it intends to accept and act upon the work done by Hydro Quebec. We have not been told there is to be an examination of the James Bay project department by department, or as a concentrated effort shared by all the departments concerned.

The problems of the native population are so serious as to be difficult for them to comprehend. They are caught between a provincial government which states it is determined to proceed with the plan and the federal government which is supposed to be protecting their interests but does not appear to be doing so. They are in danger of being uprooted from their homes, and, what is even worse, of finding their style of life completely altered because of environmental changes. One of my hon. friends will be dealing with this aspect, and I shall not expand on it further.

Under our constitution, the federal parliament and government have been assigned responsibility for the protection of navigable waters. Federal legislation requires that any work which would interfere with or alter navigable waters must first receive approval under the provisions of the Navigable Waters Protection Act. No indication has been given us that such an application is being made or that the federal government is prepared to receive one. Nor is there any indication from the Minister of Transport (Mr. Jamieson) that his department is undertaking studies upon the basis of which an informed decision may be reached when the time comes.

Surely, it is not sufficient in an undertaking of this magnitude for the Department of Transport to sit back and say: When the Province of Quebec comes along and asks us for permission we shall give the matter some thought. These studies cannot be carried out in a few weeks or months. It may be, of course, that studies are, in

[Mr. Aiken.]