

Northern Ontario Pipe Line Corporation

a situation different in some ways but in other ways very much similar indeed. A year ago the difficulty was overcome. The government apparently got itself out of the impasse by getting the minister to go on a fishing trip. Now the fishing season has again arrived and it may be that the government could get itself out of this jam because I think it is quite possible that members of the government do not like what they have been forced into doing. At any rate, it is possible that the fishing season again might help us out of our trouble.

A year ago we thought we really had learned the ultimate on the question of the disregard of parliament. But a year ago we did not have this situation. A year ago we were allowed to debate at considerable length in what Liberals like to regard as liberal tradition. Reference has been made to the former prime minister. Let me give him full credit because in all his years here he never applied closure. He was a House of Commons man. However much we may have differed with him in many ways, we knew that he had a regard for parliament. He might almost have said, like Churchill, that he was a child of parliament.

As I said, the question now is in one way astonishingly similar to what it was a year ago. It is a question of power for this minister whose work is respected in many ways but who, as somebody said tonight, should never be allowed within a thousand miles of a democratic assembly on certain occasions, and I think that is probably right. There is this difference between last year and this year. Last year the minister at least allowed us to know what was going on. There was no mystery about it. There was no mumbo-jumbo. There was nothing behind the curtain. But of course this year we have had a most extraordinary situation—a situation which one would not have believed could have happened—where the minister has carried on the business of the country in his inside pocket, where he has had certain documents. I should not call them documents. They were said not to be documents. They were just letters. It is a very interesting distinction that is made. When the minister was asked if he had documents, he said no. But when he was asked if he had letters—That was a little bit too hard for him, and he said “yes, but not such as you can see”. So we learned there, as I say, that documents are not letters. I have asked my lawyer friends and I doubt very much whether the minister could get an opinion on that point.

At any rate, after many months of indecision—and let us remember that—and of considering various proposals—the government a week ago brought down this measure.

[Mr. Macdonnell.]

They had, we understand, spent months in considering it. There was plenty of gossip—and I think it was probably well informed—that there had been grave difference in the cabinet. At any rate the thing went on for months and there was delay and delay as I have said. But there was one place where there was no delay. Once it got beyond the cabinet and into the caucus, there was no delay there. It took them only an hour or two to swallow the whole thing. Theirs not to reason why. It would be interesting if we could get an account of what took place in that caucus just as it would be interesting if we could get an account of the conversation between the minister and Mr. Frank McMahon, but we probably never will.

Mr. Sinclair: Or between Premier Frost. That would be very interesting.

Mr. Macdonnell: The minister is always very helpful and I am very grateful to him now.

Mr. Sinclair: Have you consulted Premier Frost as well, and Premier Manning, your Tory colleague in Alberta? That is much more interesting.

Mr. Macdonnell: Is the minister still speaking?

Mr. Sinclair: Yes.

Mr. Macdonnell: The minister is still standing?

Mr. Sinclair: Yes. I am asking a question.

Some hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member is asking a question. I should like to ask—

Mr. Rowe: He has only 10 minutes to go. Let him continue.

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Chairman—

The Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. member for Greenwood, who has the floor, cannot be interrupted without his consent.

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Chairman—

Some hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Rowe: The hon. member for Greenwood has only 10 minutes to go.

Mr. Sinclair: I rise on a point of order. I should like to ask you to ask the hon. member for Greenwood—

Some hon. Members: Sit down.

The Deputy Chairman: Order. If the Minister of Fisheries is not rising on a question of order or privilege, the hon. member for Greenwood may continue.