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Berger report recommends ten-year delay on gas pipeline

Mr. Justice Thomas R. Berger's report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, tabled in the House of Commons on May 9 recommends that, on environmental grounds, no pipeline should be built across the Northern Yukon.

On the other hand, it is feasible, from an environmental point of view, to build a pipeline along the Mackenzie Valley to transport gas from the Arctic. However, construction of a pipeline along the Mackenzie Valley should be postponed for ten years to allow sufficient time for a just settlement of native claims. The judge indicates that on the basis of the evidence brought before the Inquiry, the alternative overland route to carry Alaskan gas to markets in the United States, along the Alaska Highway crossing the southern Yukon is environmentally preferable to the crossing of the Northern Yukon.

Judge Berger's recommendations do not mean that Canadians "must renounce their northern gas and oil." The report said if the Government of Canada accepted the recommendations contained in the report, Canadians could build "a Mackenzie Valley pipeline at the time of their own choosing, along a route of their own choice."

Frontier also a homeland

Decisions facing Canadians about the North, said the Judge, "are not...simply about northern pipelines. They are decisions about the protection of the northern environment and the future of the northern peoples.... The North is a region of conflicting goals, preferences and aspirations...(where) the pipeline represents the advance of the industrial system to the Arctic.... The impact of a pipeline will bear especially upon the native people.... The conflict focuses on the pipeline." For some in Northern Canada, the North is a frontier, for others, it is a homeland, Judge Berger said.

Assumptions

"I have proceeded," stated the judge, "on the assumption that, in due course,



Justice Thomas R. Berger

the industrial system will require the gas and oil of the Western Arctic, and that they will have to be transported along the Mackenzie Valley to markets in the South. I have also proceeded on the assumption that we intend to protect and preserve Canada's northern environment and that, above all else, we intend to honour the legitimate claims and aspirations of the native people. All of these assumptions are embedded in the Federal Government's expressed northern policy for the 1970s."

Two pipeline companies, Canadian Arctic Gas Pipeline Ltd. and Foothills Pipe Lines Ltd., have proposed pipelines to bring gas from the Arctic along the Mackenzie Valley to consumers in the South. Arctic Gas proposes to bring Alaskan gas from Prudhoe Bay via the Northern Yukon, hook up with gas from the Mackenzie Delta and deliver to markets in Canada and the United States. Foothills proposes to bring Canadian gas south from the Mackenzie Delta.

The mandate of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry was to determine the social, environmental and economic impact of the construction of a gas pipeline and the cumulative impact of an energy corridor from the Arctic, and to recommend the terms and conditions

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