

Northern Ontario Pipe Line Corporation

The government of the province of Ontario says that new sources of energy are urgently needed to supplement hydro power. With the development that is taking place in this country, partly at least due to the good government we have here in Ottawa,—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Hees: No comedy, please.

Mr. Prudham:—it is my opinion that this gas will be needed to supplement existing sources of energy rather than to replace them. It is expected that when western natural gas is first introduced into Ontario and Quebec, there will be some slight dislocation of the coal industry by the replacement of coal with natural gas. However, in Ontario the coal that is used is largely imported from the United States. The growth of requirements for energy in Ontario is such that, after the initial adjustment, the gas that the Trans-Canada line will provide will be needed to supplement rather than to replace existing sources of energy.

During the last few days I had the honour of travelling through northern Ontario with the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River. I had a chance at first hand to see the great storehouse of resources in that part of the country. No member from northern Ontario need apologize for the extra cost of building the line through that area. In that part of the country we have one of the greatest storehouses of mineral resources in the world. Natural gas will provide the key for unlocking those great resources.

Incidentally, the amount of gas that Alberta has dedicated to the project is 4.3 trillion cubic feet, which is equivalent to 174 million tons of coal. The delivery rate in the early years of the line is estimated at 300 million cubic feet of gas per day. And that is the equivalent of about 4 million tons of coal per year.

Mr. Chairman, the points with which I have dealt emphasize the need for an early start on the construction of the trans-Canada line. The proposal now before the committee provides the only possibility of getting the line under way this year. This project must be under way during the month of June in order to complete the construction of the first section this year. The company, by accepting the proposal, agreed to make an immediate start and to finance the balance of the line by March 31 of next year or failing that to forfeit its right to build the line as well as a substantial equity. If it does not perform within the time specified, this government is committed to seeing that the line is completed

[Mr. Prudham.]

by other means. In the interests of conservation, in the interests of the orderly development of our resources and as the minister representing Alberta in this cabinet, I say let us get on with the job.

Mr. Churchill: We have witnessed in the House of Commons one of the strangest acts ever performed by a government of Canada, the imposition of closure at the virtual commencement of a debate. Yesterday in his introductory speech, the Minister of Trade and Commerce set out the arguments for the resolution now before us and gave notice of his intention to move closure. Today, he imposed it. In effect, closure was threatened and imposed before the subject matter before the house had been considered.

Now, closure was never intended to be used in this way and has never been used in this way before. In its origin in the 1880's, in Gladstone's time, it was introduced into the British House of Commons to prevent the wilful obstruction of the business of parliament by a small, irresponsible minority.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Churchill: It was not designed in the British House of Commons to restrict the official opposition. When closure became part of the rules of the Canadian House of Commons in 1912, Sir Wilfrid Laurier raised the most strenuous objection. He gave four examples of the obstruction of the business of government in the period from confederation to his day. He suggested that in the interests of free speech and the liberties of parliament it was better to endure periods of obstruction than to impose a rule as severe as closure. He said that a government, faced with obstruction, would do better to dissolve and settle the problem by an appeal to the people.

On the other hand, the Queen's government must be carried on and occasions have arisen infrequently in the history of our parliament when the government of the day has imposed closure in order to force through the house some business which it considered of vital importance. But those instances of closure occurred only after extended debate and not, as on this occasion, before the debate had commenced. This is indeed a serious misuse of a very powerful weapon. Only a government drunk with power would stoop to the immediate use of closure in order to prevent discussion in this house. It is doubly serious to curtail debate on an issue such as the one before us which is so complex, so ill-devised and so improvident. If ever a measure before the House of Commons required complete and careful consideration and examination, it is