

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

River. I was hoping that the minister would make a full statement outlining the difficulties. I was hoping he would explain why the government has not insisted in the past that the government of British Columbia enter into an agreement so that the downstream benefits are protected. I should like to know why it is that the town of Peace River has to sue to protect its position. Why has navigation along the Athabasca River been affected? The federal government has to go to the government of British Columbia cap in hand every time the government of British Columbia takes some action in connection with B.C. Hydro and the water level of the Peace River dam. The Department of Public Works has been derelict in the responsibility conferred on it by the Navigable Waters Protection Act to protect the interests of the province of Alberta and the Northwest Territories in regard to navigable waters.

I hope I have exposed the problem sufficiently and have justified my putting the question and the suggestion that Mr. Speaker should not have ruled it out of order.

Hon. Arthur Laing (Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment the hon. member for having brought this matter to the attention of the House. First, it gives me an opportunity as well as the hon. member to confirm the importance of the Mackenzie River. He will recall that Sir Alexander Mackenzie in 1789 called it the river of disappointment. I hope that to most Canadians today it is the river of very great hope. We hope to make a first-class commercial river along this route. Freight carried this year by the Northern Transportation Company was of the order of 235,000 tons. We hope that by 1972 this will be in excess of 800,000 tons. Not only is there a tremendous amount of activity along the Mackenzie River as a result of companies exploring for oil and metals, but also because of companies operating in the high Arctic Islands and Panarctic Islands.

Last summer the Northern Transportation Company carried 235,000 tons of freight at an

average cost of \$85 per ton, compared with \$25 per ton out of Seattle. We expect to make the Mackenzie River an important traffic artery. That is why we have obtained about \$500,000 for blasting to remove the rock at Sans Sault rapids. We intend to make a passage of about 600 feet in width over a distance of 900 feet. As my hon. friend has pointed out, there was a loss of about 25 days in shipping as a result of low water in the Mackenzie this year and because of the situation at Sans Sault rapids. Last year we had a very low level of rainfall and the drainage was low. Unfortunately the action by British Columbia Hydro in filling their reservoir as quickly as possible cut the level of water severely. When a corporation spends \$741 million on a dam, it wants to get water behind it as soon as it can in order to sell power.

This action cut back the normal discharge of water of 36,000 cubic feet per second on one occasion to 1,000 cubic feet per second. My hon. friend pointed out that no permit was issued. Apparently at that time the company was not required to take out a permit. Having regard to correspondence and questions by the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Skoberg), the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) and the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Harding), I had contact with Mr. Gordon Shrum, chairman of the British Columbia Hydro. He admitted that the company had cut down the outflow to 1,100 feet per second in July, 1,000 feet per second in August and 4,900 feet per second in September. When we made representations the company brought it back as quickly as it could to 15,000 feet. The danger spot occurs in the month of September and the 15 days in October when we are still shipping on the river. Prior to that the normal river flow supplies us with ample water—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the minister but his time has expired.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.32 p.m.