

Oral Questions

Canada will be used to finance this vital link in our energy distribution system to the Atlantic provinces?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the guarantee has already been given to the maritime provinces that there will be an extension of the Q and M pipeline beyond Quebec if it is the desire of the Atlantic provinces to have that kind of extension. As I have made clear several times in the House and as has my colleague, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, this is part of the comprehensive energy package proposed by this government to ensure that we are not again caught in a situation of having to increase our reliance upon foreign sources.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I know the Prime Minister on an earlier date said that a government headed by him would begin the construction and planning immediately of this gas pipeline. I want to ask him today when the planning and construction of the pipeline will begin, and how does he propose to finance it?

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure to which pipeline the hon. member is referring. There is an application, as he knows, for a pipeline to Quebec—

Mr. MacEachen: Gas pipeline.

Mr. Clark:—gas pipeline to Quebec before the National Energy Board. The question may relate—it was not clear—to the possible extension of that line beyond Quebec to the maritime provinces. My commitment in relation to that pipeline was that we would be prepared to move on it as soon as there was agreement on the part of the maritime provinces that that was necessary. That agreement, naturally, will not come until there is some further certain knowledge as to the gas potential off Sable Island. Once there is agreement from the maritime provinces that such a pipeline extension is necessary, we will proceed immediately with it.

Naturally, it will be helpful to us, to the Atlantic provinces and to the whole of Canada if there is support in this House for the comprehensive energy package which we have put forward, one element of which would allow Canada to proceed with the extension of the Q and M line to the maritime region if that is desired.

POSSIBILITY OF OIL SHORTAGES THIS WINTER

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the right hon. Prime Minister. Why did the Prime Minister allow the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to mislead this House and the people of Canada about fuel oil supplies by describing the situation as “tight but manageable”, when the Prime Minister admitted this morning at his press conference, and I quote, “We knew all along that shortages were possible”?

[Mr. MacEachen.]

• (1120)

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Prime Minister): The hon. member, I am sure, in the interest of integrity would want to quote to the House of Commons the whole of my statement at my press conference this morning, in which we indicated that we knew there would possibly be shortages, given certain circumstances such as an unusually severe winter, given excessive consumer demand and that kind of thing. We have been receiving from the National Energy Board monthly indications of their views on the current situation in Canada. Until recently their view was that the situation in Canada was tight but manageable. That was the information that I and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources communicated to the House of Commons.

There is now a view, as a result primarily of unusual increases in consumption in Canada, that there might be some limited interruptions. My hope is that by drawing the attention of Canadians to the possibility of limited interruptions, caused in large measure by excessive demand, we can encourage Canadians in all parts of the country to exercise much more conservative practices in relation to energy use, consequently avoiding the possibility of shortages anywhere in Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Symes: Mr. Speaker, I do not believe the phrase “we knew all along” squares with the answer just given by the Prime Minister, and I have given notice that I intend to raise this as a question of privilege.

By way of a supplementary question, may I ask the Prime Minister, since the National Energy Board, on the one hand, is telling the government that oil shortages are possible and, on the other hand, is still permitting the export of fuel oil to the United States and now has also approved massive exports of natural gas to the United States, how can the people of Canada have any faith in the National Energy Board and in this government about energy supplies? Why does the Prime Minister not admit that this government does not know whether it is coming or going on the issue of energy supplies?

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question is that we have a government that does know where we are going on the national energy policy.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: What we are doing is moving this nation toward energy self-sufficiency to fill the gap created by the absence of planning in former years which has created the possibility of shortages in Atlantic Canada and has increased most dangerously the dependence of Canada upon unstable foreign sources. I can also indicate to the hon. member, whose qualifications for being the energy spokesman of his party seem unrelated to any knowledge of the industry—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!