

National Energy Board Act

progress. I was very much struck by one observation the minister made. I think we all felt a certain sympathy—I know I personally did—for the minister when he said that he had overlooked this matter until March 1. But what really did astonish me was when the minister discovered on March 1 that no progress was being made with this bill—and I listened very carefully and I am sure that is what the minister said; if I am wrong he will correct me right away—why he did not do something. That was 30 days ago, sir. I do not know what has happened in those 30 days. I do remember those days in the middle of June, 1940, of course, and I am sure the Minister of Veterans Affairs will remember them, too, when one of the most important pieces of legislation that was ever passed by this parliament was drafted in a single night, introduced the next day, and passed through all stages in this house in two days and through the Senate on the third day and received royal assent. Here we have a little minor bill, when we consider all that is left of it now. Why, on March 1, when the minister found this had happened, he did not get a special meeting of the legislation committee—and I assume this government has one, as we had, under the Minister of Justice—why he did not get it approved at the council and get it before that day ended, or if it was late, at least by March 2, on the order paper of this house or the other place, it is hard for me to understand.

Then the minister mentioned the matter here, if I remember correctly, on March 18, in response to a question from my hon. friend about the business of the house. If my arithmetic is right, it was March 24 when this bill was first introduced in the other place, which promptly took its usual long weekend and consideration was not completed there until yesterday. It does seem to me that we can forgive anything that happened before March 1, and feel a certain sympathy for the minister's difficulties before that time but really, I am flabbergasted. I have had a long experience, as hon. members know, not in parliament—I have not been here nearly as long as the hon. gentleman—but on the periphery of parliament, and have had a lot to do with legislation that was subsequently introduced in this parliament and this case does seem to me to be unique. It seemed to me, just so that there would be a kind of recollection of it so that it would not happen again, perhaps this deserved to be mentioned.

Mr. Churchill: I want to thank the hon. member for forgiving all my sins in January and February but not absolving me from

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

my sins in March. I would say this to him. Perhaps I will put down some notes with regard to what happened in March and if the executors of my estate determine something should be written about my life and appoint the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate to do the writing, he will have all the information available to him and know exactly what happened during the month of March.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): This matter is one of importance, not only because of the permission that will be extended by parliament to some 20 companies in respect of licences which they have enjoyed in the matter of the export of power, but important for the reason which the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate has emphasized, and which, I think, bears some repetition, even though I may not do it on exactly the same basis as the hon. member.

Those of us who have been in this house for some time will recall the very strong positions taken by hon. gentlemen opposite when they were sitting on the benches on this side about any alleged effort on the part of the administration in any way to pressure the House of Commons into the consideration of matters which time did not afford. We would have been challenged by hon. gentlemen opposite, and particularly by the Prime Minister, if we had taken the course which the minister for one reason or another has been forced to take in this matter. We would have been told first of all that this was a bill that should have been introduced in this chamber first. That was not the course adopted by the present government. Of course, the reason why the upper chamber dealt with this matter first was that time was running out and it was necessary to run to the other place first.

But that does not in any way absolve hon. gentlemen from themselves now being implicated in the very charges which they on other occasions, in the light of their previous conduct, would have made. It is a violation of the spirit of parliament for any government to present legislation of this importance in the way in which this legislation now comes to us in this house. We are dealing with it for the first time this afternoon and because of the exigencies we are going to extend passage of the bill before five o'clock in order to guarantee to some 20 corporations in this country a right previously extended to them by parliament.

No member of parliament is open to censure for criticizing vigorously the position in which the government has placed us at this time. I join with the hon. member for Kootenay West in saying that the minister