

Nuclear Power

business as listed on today's Order Paper, namely, public bills, notices of motions and private bills.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS

[English]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Shall all orders preceding No. 48 stand by unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

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NATIONAL RESOURCES AND PUBLIC WORKS**MORATORIUM UNTIL REFERENDUM ON DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA OF NUCLEAR POWER**

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill) moved that Bill C-248, to establish a moratorium on the continued development of nuclear power in Canada for the purposes of establishing a public inquiry into nuclear power that is followed by a national referendum, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on National Resources and Public Works.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of pleasure that I rise today to speak on Bill C-248, an act which (1) establish a moratorium on the continued development of nuclear power in Canada; (2) set up a public inquiry into the issues raised by nuclear power and (3) require that after this inquiry a national referendum be held to determine whether Canada should proceed with a nuclear future.

● (1600)

I should mention that this is my first private members' bill. I consider it providential in a way that it was selected for debate, even though the debate will be for one hour. The government will talk out the honour so that the bill cannot be voted on or sent to the appropriate standing committee.

Mr. Knowles: Shame.

Mr. Blaikie: It is not possible in just 20 minutes to address the many issues in question which are and should be part of any discussion on nuclear power. Accordingly, I will try today to focus primarily on the process by which we are deciding, or appear to have decided already, that Canada is to proceed with the nuclear future planned for it for so long by the Liberal Party, Atomic Energy of Canada, Ontario Hydro and other long-established actors on the Canadian nuclear stage.

My basic contention is that the process by which we have come as far as we have already toward a nuclear future for Canada is undemocratic. Bureaucrats, technocrats and various other so-called experts from government and the nuclear industry have made decisions which will affect the lives of all

Canadians, decisions which in my view should be made openly, politically, after ample informed public discussion of, and reflection upon the implications of various options. This is not the kind of decision making we have had up until now.

The three parts of Bill C-248 are intended to deal with this tragic and perhaps fatal flaw in our collective decision-making process as a nation.

The moratorium is the necessary first step because, without a moratorium, it is difficult to believe any ensuing public debate will be taken seriously by the government or the nuclear industry. It also ensures that time limits for the debate will be taken seriously. The nuclear industry has a vested interest in talking about the issue, as long as it can proceed with its plans while talking. Indeed, it has professional talkers, public relations people who are paid to relate to critics while the industry proceeds as ever. A moratorium would give meaning to debate and represent a significant precedent in the location of burden of proof.

It is not the critics who should have to prove they are right, as long as there is reasonable doubt, as there is in this case. The critics can only be proved right or wrong by time and tragedy. It is the nuclear industry which should have to answer for its claims. The burden of proof should be on them. The situation we are in now is analogous to one in which the blindfolded driver of a car moving down a crowded street complains of unfounded criticism because he has managed not to hit anyone yet.

The public inquiry is a necessary second step because it is only through the instrument of such an inquiry that public consciousness about this issue can be sufficiently raised. My idea of this inquiry is similar to that which actually occurred around the issue of the Mackenzie Valley Pipe Line in 1977, under the auspices of Justice Thomas Berger. His held a travelling inquiry which listened to all sorts of people, raised public consciousness about native land rights and the environmental fragility of northern Canada. He made good recommendations which, unfortunately I must add, have not been respected by this government. But the understanding and perception of the issues which that inquiry facilitated for many Canadians have not disappeared. I want to underline this as we find ourselves debating Bill C-48 in committee, the Canada Lands Act, which will make a mockery of some of the rhetoric we have heard from the government lately about aboriginal rights.

As I was saying, the understanding and perception of the issues which the Mackenzie Valley Pipe Line inquiry facilitated for many Canadians have not disappeared. It exists in the seething anger and disappointment which is building in this country about the way this government is dealing with the North and its people, in spite of its recent abstract conversion to the concept of aboriginal rights, and in its formal but actually meaningless commitment to environmental assessment.

Nothing close to what I am suggesting in the way of a public inquiry into nuclear power has ever been remotely contemplated by recent governments. The federal Progressive