

Trans-Alaska Pipeline

It is still time today, more than ever, to do something because the situation is extremely urgent.

[English]

Mr. R. J. Orange (Northwest Territories): Mr. Speaker, I believe this debate has been most useful and productive. I believe the Canadian public now understand better what this business of a pipeline in the north is all about. Northern people have been aware of the possibilities of pipelines through their country for some time. Naturally, like other people they have questions and concerns and wonder what it will do in respect of their lives, the environment and the area in which they live. The majority of the people whom I try to represent to the best of my ability are the Indian and Eskimo people of the Northwest Territories. These people are aware of what is happening as a result of oil and gas exploration in the Mackenzie Valley and in the high Arctic Islands. They have a number of apprehensions in respect of how their lives will be affected.

At the very outset I believe it might be useful to read into the record a letter sent to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien) by the people of Fort Good Hope which is an Indian community in the Arctic circle on the Mackenzie River consisting of 400 or 500 people, most of whom are hunters and trappers. This letter was sent to the minister by the Fort Good Hope Settlement Council, which is composed primarily of Indians and Métis. It is addressed to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and states:

In view of the apparent increasing opposition by the people in the N.W.T. to oil exploration, gas and oil pipeline construction etc., we the Fort Good Hope Settlement Council on behalf of the people here wish to give you our support in this area of northern development.

Our people realize that exploration does, in some ways disturb the environment and cause problems, but we strongly feel that progress must be encouraged and not discouraged, as it seems a minority group are trying to do. The people who say that the N.W.T. natives are united in their attempts to halt the pipeline are wrong. We feel that the pipeline when construction starts, will give us nothing but benefit, and at that, less benefit than these settlements who are right on the proposed route of the pipeline.

If it were not at this time possible for our men to work on experimental pipeline, seismic or drilling crews, there would be no employment at all in our area, our men on these jobs are being well paid and treated very well by their employers. Rey Geophysical and the experimental gas pipeline run by Williams Bros. have been exceptional in hiring from here.

We also feel that if the government and the oil companies when moving into the area first of all have a discussion with the people of that area and explain their purpose for being there, and most important to the people, hire some of them to work on the project. If this is done there should be no opposition to oil work in the north, and certainly not for the Fort Good Hope area. It is when a company move in and start work in the area without us knowing who they are, or what they are doing, and without hiring our men that we have resentment against them, early discussion will save later problems.

Sincerely,

Fort Good Hope Settlement Council

Mr. Speaker, in the few moments I have available to me I want to stress to the government and the oil indus-

[Mr. Fortin.]

try that it is important that the people in the north benefit from the construction of oil and gas pipelines. I think up until this point the government and the companies have been aware of the importance of involving the northern people in this program. As has been outlined by the two ministers today, we have seen the attempts by the government to communicate with the native people in respect of the plans for and effect of oil and gas exploration and oil and gas pipelines. I should like to think that the northern people generally want pipelines, but under proper conditions. They want part of the action. They want to be involved. We want to see these people involved not only in the construction phase but in the operational phase. Already as a result of the test programs conducted by a number of the groups interested in building these lines and operating them, certain programs are under way. I say to these companies and to the government: It is a good start, but it is only a start.

● (4:40 p.m.)

If we look at how much of our land we will use in the construction, we will find that statistics show that less than 40 square miles of the Northwest Territories would be used for the construction of a gas and oil pipeline. However, this line will move through various parts of our country, from permafrost through muskeg, along eskers and into the boreal forest area where pipelining should not present any particular or unusual difficulties. However, the Arctic areas concern us. We have heard again today of the work that has been done in Inuvik by the Mackenzie Valley pipeline group to investigate the effects of pipelines on the tender Arctic ecology.

I am one of those fortunate people in this House who has had an opportunity to observe this pipeline experiment. As I understand it, this experiment is designed to test oil pipelining under all possible conditions. It is in the second winter of its operation and, as the ministers have indicated, hopefully results will be forthcoming on the effect on permafrost before the end of this year.

There is a third area which I think must be considered. Some discussion has taken place today with regard to the route. Regardless of whether we end up with an oil pipeline in the Mackenzie before or after the TAPS line is built, as was so well put by the hon. member for Calgary South (Mr. Mahoney) I am convinced that there will be a gas pipeline. This gas line will run from Prudhoe Bay, along the Arctic coast, possibly make a detour through the Yukon and the Old Crow Flats and then go up the Mackenzie River.

There is a problem of which I know the government is aware, but I think it has to be brought out—that is with respect to the route of the first part of the line.

There are two alternatives. One is that the pipeline goes down the Arctic coast from Prudhoe, turns the corner at Richardson Mountains over the Mackenzie River and then continues on up the Mackenzie Valley. The second alternative is to avoid the Arctic coast, because of a wildlife reserve which is in Alaska, and cut across the Porcupine Valley into the Old Crow Flats. I would be concerned about this direction because it would