

Government Organization Act, 1970

in relation to a particular matter, has expressly decreed otherwise.

To accept the amendment would, in effect, be acting in a manner contrary to the expressed intention of Parliament in either past instances or in future cases, and I do not think the House would really want to do this. I think hon. members feel the House should be free to assign specific duties to particular departments in the legislation covering their particular jurisdictions, even though to some degree they relate to pollution, or pollution prevention and control, rather than vest the supreme, the over-riding authority in this particular minister.

• (3:10 p.m.)

The intention, obviously, of the current bill is this: where pollution is the primary concern of Parliament, unless it is decreed that that particular matter shall be under the jurisdiction of some other department, it shall be under the jurisdiction of the new minister of the environment. I think that this is the type of provision which allows the House full freedom to make specific exemptions from the general control where, in its view, it is necessary. For that reason, the government would not wish to support this amendment.

Mr. Rose: Mr. Chairman, I was interested in the remarks of the President of the Treasury Board. I speak in support of the amendment, because it seems to me that one of the problems we face as Canadians is fighting this sinister force known as pollution that can, if left unchecked, destroy us all. I was interested in the minister's remarks about Parliaments of the future. Many of us are concerned in case our future is rather limited. It will be unless we actively, positively and ruthlessly do something to solve this particular problem. The battle against pollution has not been conducted in a comprehensive way because responsibility for pollution control is split among many levels of government, federal, provincial and, of course, municipal. Also, the responsibility is split among so many ministries at the federal and provincial level that the prosecution of offences and the correction of excesses is exceedingly difficult.

Some of us who are interested in this matter had hoped that the government intended designating the minister of the new department as the person with supreme responsibility in our country for the fight against pollution. We hoped that he was to be the veritable czar in matters of pollution. The public, I think, is concerned about pollution control. If we are to heed the public's justifiable concern over pollution, it seems to me that we ought to invest the minister with the power he needs to combat pollution at every level. Is the idea of a czar in the field of pollution control mere window dressing? If it is not window dressing, why cannot he be given the power he needs to combat pollution at all levels?

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Chairman, I will speak briefly. I support the amendment wholeheartedly. In the past, the government has displayed a wishy-washy attitude towards pollution. Pollution has taken the place of motherhood; everybody is for it, so long as no one has to do

too much about it. That has been the attitude of the government, as illustrated by the Canada water bill.

I think the problem we face has been set out precisely by the hon. member who moved the amendment. Jurisdiction in the field is divided. I know the President of the Treasury Board has said that Parliament has decreed otherwise. I think Parliament has decreed otherwise wrongly. This amendment is an attempt to rectify the situation, and would also make sure that pollution could be dealt with as a single issue by a single minister. As a matter of fact, I think that pollution ought to be a matter of discussion today, at the federal-provincial conference.

An hon. Member: It is.

Mr. Baldwin: Someone says that it is. How do we know that?

Mr. Drury: Mr. Chairman, I had expected to be asked to explain why the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry is not present today. The fact of the matter is that, right now, he is at the federal-provincial conference to discuss pollution.

Mr. Baldwin: Of course, he is over there to discuss pollution. But is he urging the provincial governments to agree with the federal government that the direction of the battle against pollution which threatens all humanity and all citizens of our country should be placed under a single administration? The pollution problems that we shall have to face in this country for a long time are the problems that peoples of all countries will have to face. Nevertheless, we have seen the government adopting a very wishy-washy approach to the matter. It is fine for the minister to talk about pollution; everyone loves to hear talk of pollution control. But what is the government doing to control pollution? There is before the committee a sensible amendment. I support it wholeheartedly. I hope the mild words I have spoken will induce some government members to support it as well.

Mr. Harding: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the President of the Treasury Board a question? Why has he specifically omitted the Northwest Territories and the Yukon area from the jurisdiction of the new minister?

Mr. Drury: Mr. Chairman, I think the answer is that we have not expressly omitted the Northwest Territories and the Yukon from the jurisdiction of the minister in pollution matters.

Mr. Harding: Mr. Chairman, although it seems to me that the government is determined to defeat the amendment, may I say this. It seems to me that the government will ignore the economic developments in the north and bypass the environmental problems of that area. I do not think there is any doubt about it, and the people of the area know this. For years, many environmental problems of that area have been ignored, and that is why there are no land use regulations today to control the current economic developments. It is true that those regulations may be introduced later. I submit that the failure to include one of the most vulnerable parts of our nation under this bill is a disaster.

[Mr. Drury.]