

Point of Order

Period that it was my understanding that he was on the record as supporting the agreement.

I stand to be corrected if he wishes to correct me. I now stand corrected, Mr. Speaker.

BILL C-78

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, my second point of order is in relation to what is happening with Bill C-78.

As some members will recall, on June 27, page 13173 of *Hansard* the Minister of State for Youth and the Minister of State for Fitness, and the Deputy Leader of the government in the House moved a motion dated June 26, 1990 respecting Bill C-78, an Act to establish the federal environmental assessment process, that it stand adjourned until Monday, September 24, 1990 with various provisions.

At that point, our Whip the member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan pointed out:

I am just wondering if the minister can indicate that once the committee has been established, it will not meet during July and August, and that there may be a short meeting in September to deal with the agenda. The purpose of establishing the committee now is to let people know that the committee is available to receive briefs and that it will be looking for information.

Second, can the minister indicate that the 1984 cabinet guidelines dealing with the environmental assessment review process will not be modified unless the Minister of the Environment has met with the committee?

Then the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons confirmed that.

The point that I am making is that at that time on the closing day of this Chamber in June, a special committee was struck. For the first time in the history of the House, a bill which had not completed second reading was referred to the special committee so that we could, as I understood it and as other members understood it, redraft a very important environmental piece of legislation for Canadians now and on into the future.

We have only just started our hearings. We have only heard from FEARO, from Mr. Robinson, and we are just about to hear witnesses from across Canada to redraft Bill C-78 as we understood we were supposed to. For three months the special committee has been solely a post box. There have been no witnesses. The members have not been sitting. We did not have a chair. Mr.

Stevenson was not appointed until just a matter of days ago to actually chair the committee.

I think hon. members need to hear from the government side on this point of order, how it is possible that we set up a special committee process, and as soon as the special committee process gets going it is collapsed so that second reading of Bill C-78 can be completed, which will force it off to a legislative committee where only minor adjustments can be made. The serious amendments with which the committee has undertaken its study simply cannot be made to Bill C-78 once it goes to a legislative committee.

Mr. Speaker: It is not a point of order.

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): With due respect, Mr. Speaker, what was done was to accommodate the wish that the subject matter of this legislation, very important, could be proceeded with while the House went into recess for the summer and that is what was done.

It is not an unexceptional thing. It has been done in the past. There is no reason in the world why the committee cannot work. There is no reason in the world why amendments to Bill C-78, if appropriate, cannot be made when it goes to committee stage. It happens all the time. That is the purpose. I do not understand why the hon. member is upset. It is desired to have Bill C-78 debated and voted on in principle as soon as possible. Then it goes to committee and, based on the work of committee, amendments can be made if the committee in its wisdom decides they should be made. That is part of the legislative program.

To do what the hon. member is suggesting would be to ask the government to withdraw this legislation and bring in something else later on, next year some time, and I do not think it would be prudent for us to wait.

Mr. Speaker: I have heard the hon. member for Skeena, but I am persuaded by the hon. House leader that this is something that has been done before. The government has the right to set the order of business. I would urge that if there are concerns from the hon. member for Skeena and his colleagues that those concerns be the subject of further discussions with the hon. House leader.