

Supply

Sir, the South Moresby issue is a litmus test of our values as a society. How much importance do we attach to the aesthetic, the intangible, even the spiritual values that South Moresby represents? Those qualities do not readily lend themselves to cost/benefit analysis. That fact does not make them any less compelling. Again, some of the strongest arguments for saving South Moresby are economic. But it is the other arguments that cry out for us to act: the ones that strike at the heart of what we stand for as a people, the ones that address whether we stand for anything beyond feeding and clothing and sheltering ourselves.

Providence, Sir, has seen fit to bequeath to us the second biggest piece of real estate in the world, with resources beyond the imagination of most other nations and beyond even our own capacity to exploit them. In such a vast and bountiful land, do we have it in us to protect our country's finest features? Just as we have benefited from the foresight of other generations, we have an opportunity to save and pass on something special to our children, their children, and their children after them.

• (1240)

Genesis tells us that the Lord created the planet and all living things upon it and that He gave us domain over it all. It is for us, as mortal creatures, to decide whether we will exercise wise stewardship over those special features that give our existence context and meaning or whether we will treat them as dispensable in this throwaway society of ours.

Sir John A. Macdonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada, the man who forged a country from sea to sea out of a vast wilderness, who opened the west, who linked an infant nation with tracks of iron, had the vision of a great dominion in this, the winter half of North America. The same man saw the value of establishing the country's first national park in 1885 at Banff.

Banff, at that time, was just 10 square kilometres of wilderness surrounding some hot springs. Like the Queen Charlotte Islands today, Banff was seemingly remote and inaccessible, and even inhospitable. Many of the identical arguments used today against establishing a national park at South Moresby were used in 1885 against Banff. "Why would anyone want to go there?" Sir John A. Macdonald had a vision which went well beyond the immediate needs and wants of his generation. Are we ourselves so much less capable of vision that we cannot act to save this important part of our natural heritage? Can we not bring ourselves to say "this is special, this deserves to be protected, let us save it?" Only we Canadians can save South Moresby. If we do not do it, no one will. Once lost, it will be lost forever.

Even as I speak, the Government of Canada is involved in accelerating intense negotiations with the Government of British Columbia. I eagerly await the B.C. Government's most recent proposal, following a full discussion which I and the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) had with the Premier of B.C., Mr. Vander Zalm.

Based on that discussion and on news reports which we are getting out of Victoria right now, I believe there is common resolve between the federal Government and the B.C. Government to act on this most vital of issues.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMillan: Whether I am right will be clearer today, perhaps before the debate on this important question is completed. Whatever the outcome may be, and I am optimistic that it will be what we all want, I thank all Members of the House on all sides for their support and encouragement. Although between Members of Parliament and between Parties we may differ on the particulars surrounding the establishment of the national park, we are, I know, united on one thing—South Moresby must be saved. Let us rise to the occasion and do it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Scott (Hamilton—Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate most warmly the Minister of the Environment (Mr. McMillan), not only for spearheading the very positive negotiations with the Province of British Columbia, but for spearheading as well the non-partisan and very constructive debate we have heard in this Chamber from Members of different political Parties representing such vastly different regions of the country as Skeena and Humber—Port-au-Port—St. Barbe in Newfoundland.

I am not trying to indulge in the natural cynicism of my former profession in the media, but I would like to ask the Minister a question for clarification. I trust that this is academic, but let us take the worst possible scenario and consider what would happen if negotiations for a national park failed. What happens if it is game over? Is there another route the Government could take? For example, could we establish a national park in South Moresby unilaterally without the co-operation of the province? It is an important question which I would like to have the Minister clarify.

Mr. McMillan: Mr. Speaker, let me deal with the technical dimension of my answer and then with the values part of it. On the former, we must face the fact that this land does not belong to the people of Canada through their Government. It is British Columbia Crown land. We could not just march in and establish a national park without the consent of the people of B.C. as represented by their Government, even if we wanted to.

Some people argue that we should turn off the fiscal tap, we should withdraw transfer payments, we should renege on federal-provincial agreements, for example, in the forestry area. None of those things is even being considered because the people of Canada would not want us to consider them. It is not in the spirit of the country.

On the latter dimension of my answer, I think a national park must flow from the will of the people who benefit from the values which will be saved. The rest of our national park