

National Parks Act

national parks. This will allow for more effective channelling of visitors, at the same time limiting the destruction of land for road construction. This already has been done with success at Point Pelee and will be done at Kluane to enable visitors to reach look-out points over the glaciers. Another step toward improved management practices was taken in May of this year. So that regions can be represented more closely by staff in the area, the number of our regional offices was increased from three to five. We now have offices in Calgary, Winnipeg, Cornwall, Quebec City and Halifax.

The philosophy of the National Parks Act is that of conservation and recreation. Conservation takes priority, as it must if Canada is to have special places to recreate. Bill S-4 does not alter this basic concept. I ask hon. members for their unanimous support in approving this bill.

• (1550)

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Speaker, members of my party share the view of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Marchand). We would like to get this bill into committee where we could take a fairly detailed look at some of its provisions and also make some proposals to fill the gaps where the provisions are not adequate.

I think we can accept and agree with the statement by the parliamentary secretary that no new policy is incorporated in this proposal. That, indeed, is part of the difficulty with the bill because there is a clear unhappiness in many parts of the country about the present practices, if not the policy, of the parks division of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. We want the chance to recommend in committee some changes that will meet these problems. Because these matters are so widespread and cause such concern across the country, a number of members on this side want to comment on existing parks policy and practice at this time.

First, I wish to pay tribute to and draw the attention of members of this House to the very extensive and useful discussion which occurred in the other place. I think the record of the debates there would be informative to any member of this House and anyone interested in national parks generally. It is important, also, to bear in mind that the discussion in the other place resulted in an amendment which is now incorporated in Bill S-4. It did not go as far as the proponents would have wished. There is, as you know, Mr. Speaker, a different minority-majority situation in the other place, for reasons that do not need to be gone into, and I think the person seeking the amendment wisely settled for as much as the minister would accept.

The amendment in the other place was one to democratize the system of establishing national parks in Canada and the system of adding to or taking from the territory of our national parks. There was a desire expressed, therefore, for public hearings. Because of the attitude of the minister as expressed through the Director of Parks Canada, there was a movement back from the request for public hearings, and a settlement for a requirement in the bill that there be 90 days' advance notice published in the *Canada Gazette* of any proposed changes in the boundaries of national parks. That is not as strong a dose of

[Mr. Marchand (Kamloops-Cariboo).]

democracy as was wanted, nor is it as strong a dose of democracy as will be wanted by members of this House in committee, but it was the most the minister would settle for. Members of the other place, being realists, recognize that the government is not as amenable to changes there as they might be to changes made by a committee of our House.

I think it is important to establish the principle that whenever there are significant changes to national parks in Canada, we must ensure the right of public hearing; there must be an opportunity for everyone to comment, not an opportunity merely for that eccentric minority that whiles away its time reading the *Canada Gazette*. The government claims that it has a commitment to public hearings concerning national parks, but it is significant, in evaluating that claim, to recognize that a provision for public hearings has been kept out of this bill even though there was an opportunity to adopt an amendment which would achieve that end.

It is significant, also, to recall that the government declined to call public hearings in the community of Jasper, a townsite within a national park, when there was a very serious proposal put forward by the minister relative to the removal of railway facilities which would have affected 1,200 individuals living there. There has been difficulty with public hearings and public participation in the establishment of the Ship Harbour park in Nova Scotia, a park which is not referred to in this legislation because there is still outstanding disagreement about that provision. There has also been reluctance on the part of the government to hold public hearings regarding other aspects of parks policy in the country.

The director of Parks Canada, speaking in the committee of the other place, suggested there was no need for public hearings because there was an opportunity for persons who had points to raise to make them before committees of this House or of the other place. That clearly is an impractical suggestion. Not only are the committees of this House, in particular, and of the other place overburdened with work already, but we operate at too great a distance from the people who have important points to make about the establishment of or the diminution of our national parks. He also suggested that the minister would keep an eye upon the public service in case they proposed something extravagant. I think no one who has had experience with the administration of national parks in the country will accept that the minister can act in the stead of the public when he is dealing with senior public servants, in particular, who have been involved at the centre of that department for far too long.

May I call it four o'clock, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): It being four o'clock, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper, namely, public bills, notices of motion, and private bills.