

*Fisheries Act*

absolute authority to the Minister to allocate fish among various user groups; for example, sports fishermen, commercial fishermen and native people. To give that authority without guidelines or criteria upon which decisions can be made causes me to question the move which the Government has taken.

There is a principle of holding those wielding power accountable. That is the basic notion of democracy. It is the basic principle which underpins the existence of this place. The purpose of having Parliament is to hold executive power accountable. Originally, Parliaments were set up in an attempt to bring some accountability to the exercise of power by the kings of old. In fact, the arbitrary use of power in historical circumstances even led to the loss of one's head being taken by a king. It is a serious question. I am not suggesting that we should behead the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. Fraser), but I think it is important to mention the absolute authority which is being given to an executive. We must do that with caution.

It is surprising that the Conservative Government has brought forward legislation which offers absolute authority to a member of the executive. Over the last number of years, the Conservative Party had a proud tradition in the House of speaking in support of parliamentary democracy. The Conservative Party, when in opposition, told the Government that it could not be arrogant and that it must be accountable to the people. It is sad that the Conservatives, now that they are in office, are changing their ways. They are no longer acting the way they did when they were in opposition. Surely, a Party which has a long tradition of concern about Parliament would draft legislation which clearly spells out the basis upon which the Government will act. This legislation fails that test.

There is another area in which this legislation is wanting; that is the whole question of meaningful consultation. Obviously, in order for government in this large country to work, it is necessary to consult with the groups which are affected by government decisions. It is also necessary for those consultations to be meaningful. It is not adequate simply to have conversations about fisheries; there must be meaningful consultation. The government must provide a real opportunity for groups which are affected by its decisions to have an impact on the direction of government policy.

The united opposition of the groups which are affected by this legislation—sports fishermen, commercial fishermen and native people—is testimony to the fact that the consultations which have taken place to date have not been adequate. I am trying to be fair in giving the Government some credit when it says that it has consulted with people. However, somewhere along the road those consultations have broken down and failed. If the consultations had been successful, there would have been support from people in the fisheries for the legislation. Surely, we must accept the proposition that the people who actually fish are just as concerned, if not more so, as the Government about the conservation of the fishery. Obviously, the legislation has been brought before the House on the presupposition that the Government needs authority to

manage the fishery in order that the resources can be conserved. But we must accept that the people who are involved in the fisheries have, as their first interest, the conservation of the fishery. If the people who are committed to the fishery still find the legislation, in spite of its high aims, to be wanting, then there are some real questions which must be addressed.

When the Conservative Party was running for office it promised a new era of co-operation and it promised to go beyond confrontation in government. It is ironic and sad that it should be the Party which, now that it is in office, has failed to carry out the necessary and meaningful consultations with the groups which are affected. Again, this Government, when it was in opposition, said one thing, in the election campaign said one thing, but now that it is in office it is behaving in the opposite way. The Government is imposing policies and legislation upon a community, rather than having the legislation and policy develop out of the community and adopted by the Government.

● (1250)

As long as we are being asked to give this sweeping authority to allocate the various user groups to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, I think it is legitimate to ask whether the people who are involved in the fisheries trust that Department to have such unfettered authority. Is there a basis upon which the people in the fishing industry could agree that they would like some guidelines for this Department to operate under, but in the absence of those guidelines they have experienced such a good working relationship with this Department over the years that they know it will only act in their best interests? I believe that most Canadians would find it difficult to bring themselves to a point where they could say to a government bureaucracy: "We will just trust that what you do will be in our best interests. We will just trust that the rules and regulations you make, which have a life and death impact on our incomes, will be fair and equitable and will allow us to continue to make a decent income".

Most of us have had experience in dealing with large bureaucracies, not only in the public sector but in the private sector as well. We have all been frustrated by the experience of trying to have our needs met and our voices heard. The Conservative Party, I must point out, Mr. Speaker, was a very strong critic of the abuse of bureaucratic authority when it was in opposition. Those Hon. Members were very strong critics of administrative fiat. I believe this Government deserves some credit in terms of the income tax area. It has made a number of commitments that Canadians would be treated more fairly in their relationship with the Department of National Revenue. I have some real doubts whether that is going to come about in practice, as I am sure most Canadians have, but at least the Government has said that there is a need to recognize the rights of citizens. It has announced and issued a Bill of Rights for taxpayers which is a commitment on behalf of the Government and the Department of National Revenue to treat taxpayers fairly. Wouldn't it be nice, Mr. Speaker, if the Government would take the same attitude in the area of the fisheries, rather than simply asking for a blank cheque for the