

Supply

the bubbling hot springs, the teeming wildlife, the wide-open spaces, the pristine stillness, the sheer beauty of an unspoiled world. Sir, as a Canadian who lives on one island, Prince Edward Island, almost as far from the Queen Charlottes as one can reside and still be in Canada, I feel a special personal kinship for those remote misty isles on the opposite coast.

● (1230)

It has been said that some countries are shaped by their history, others by their geography. I believe that in large measure Canada belongs in the latter category. It is a statement about our sense of nationhood that Canadians from coast to coast care deeply, even passionately, about a small family of islands which many of them have never seen but which they know instinctively ought to be saved because they are part of themselves.

In the last three months alone, I have received nearly 1,000 individual letters urging the Canadian Government, through myself and Environment Canada, and through the parks service of my department in particular, to protect South Moresby. Many more people have spoken to me directly about their concerns, and still more have signed petitions and raised the issue with other members of the Government and other Members of Parliament. We have heard from Canadians in all parts of the country, of all ages and from all walks of life.

Typical of the concern expressed to me was a letter received from Silas Donham. He wrote:

I'm eleven years old, and I live on Boularderie Island, in Cape Breton. I live in the country and I'm very concerned about the environment. I have recently heard about the—Queen Charlotte Island logging. These islands harbour some of the rarest species of plant and animal life in the world, and they should definitely be preserved. I know you're always talking about the actions you're going to take, but it's not good enough to just talk. You have to do something.

I agree with Silas and with the implied criticism, perhaps, in his letter. Talk is not enough. Parliamentary debate, however important, is not enough. Negotiations, though necessary, are not enough. Even deep-seated concern is not enough. In the words of this 11-year old, "we must do something".

In my first major speech as Minister of the Environment in September, 1985, in Banff, I committed the Government of Canada to the establishment of a national park reserve on South Moresby as a government-wide priority. Since that time, we as a Government have negotiated intensively with the British Columbia Government and consulted closely with the Haida people. The task has not always been easy. In many ways we have been racing against time and ducking the chainsaw. We are now at the crossroads. Time is running out. Key decisions must be made and value judgments rendered.

Allow me to stress one point. This is not an economy-versus-ecology issue. The world-wide interest in the ecology of this magnificent part of British Columbia and Canada provides us with a significant tourism opportunity in the context of establishing a national park. The benefits would accrue, not just to the people of British Columbia, not just to the people of

the Queen Charlotte Islands most certainly, but to all Canadians.

Those who believe the islands are too remote, too inaccessible or too inclement to attract and accommodate tourists do not know the tourism industry. No longer, Sir, is tourism a matter of mom and dad and the two kids and the dog packing themselves into the family station-wagon for a week in the country or a weekend at the lake. It is a highly segmented market with increasing numbers of consumers seeking a remote, wilderness, exotic, and even safari experience. It is no accident that in Yukon tourism is now the number one industry. Yet Yukon is farther removed from key population centres than is South Moresby, and its climate is less hospitable.

The essential appeal of South Moresby is so universal that its success as an international tourism destination is assured, provided it is saved. Indeed, it is a likely candidate for world heritage status, in the company of the Giza Pyramids and the Taj Mahal.

The Government of Canada is committed to working with the B.C. Government to develop immediately the tourism opportunity afforded through a heritage and environmentally sensitive economic strategy for the entire Queen Charlotte Islands area.

Difficult decisions need to be made. There are legitimate forest industry concerns. There are important questions of compensation, not just for the forestry companies and their contractors but also for the individual loggers and for others dependent on logging for their pay cheque. The communities life-blood has for years been drawn primarily from the logging industry. Those significant interests must be respected and reflected in any plan to establish a national park, and they will be.

If this were an easy issue, it would have been solved long ago and with much less soul-searching than many of us have had to do. Despite the support of all three federal Parties in the House of Commons, and despite widespread support in the country at large, we are not debating a motherhood issue. The establishment of a national park is never motherhood. Contentious and often complex land use interests are at stake, involving competing demands and conflicting values, each of them worthy in itself. After all, people have fought wars and spilled blood over land. Clearly, such is not the flavour of the current controversy, but land is at the heart of it. Whether we ourselves rise to the challenge to save a precious part of our heritage is a measure of our maturity as a country and of our civility as a people. The prophetic conservationist Aldo Leopold wrote in 1949:

Ability to see the cultural value of wilderness boils down, in the last analysis, to a question of intellectual humility . . . It is only the scholar who understands why the raw wilderness gives definition and meaning to the human enterprise.

I take issue with this gentleman merely in one respect. It is not only the scholar who has such an appreciation. We politicians, representative of the people of Canada, must have that appreciation, too.