

*Government Organization Act, 1970*

• (3:40 p.m.)

This is what the amendment now before the committee is all about. This is why I believe that if the minister were here he would be anxious to have such an amendment incorporated. It would clearly define what he is seeking to do, namely, to set national standards for the environment. In the same article in the *Sunday Express* appear the following words:

Mr. Davis rejects the concept of varying standards of water quality as espoused by J. J. Greene, Minister of Energy, when he had charge of the Canada Water Act.

Mr. Chairman, the minister himself was saying in that interview what we are trying to say in the House this afternoon and what my hon. friend is advocating in his amendment. If this bill is to mean anything at all, it must set up national objectives and standards for cleaning up our environment. The minister referred to this again the other day in the statement he made on first reading of the clean air bill. It was to set national standards. This is why the bill was brought in. He brought it in so there would be a national standard for clean air, not a standard affected by the special interest of particular provinces, of particular municipalities or even of international interests. It would be one decided upon in the overriding interests of this country as a whole. While I am on the subject of the press release of February 9, in connection with the clean air bill, I noticed it said:

Mr. Davis is minister-designate of the new department of the environment.

Mr. Chairman, there is no new department of the environment. Parliament has yet to give approval of the establishment of a department of the environment. There is a proposal to set up such a department. I suggest that the person responsible for writing that press release, and the minister who must take ultimate responsibility for it, were anticipating what they have no right to anticipate, namely, that Parliament will give consent to this bill as proposed by the government.

In this connection I have an amendment to move when we come to clause 2 regarding the name of the department. It is one which the minister, being the sensible man he is, will certainly be prepared to consider. The whole debate this afternoon underlines the ludicrous situation in which we find ourselves. We are trying to advance arguments to improve this legislation agreeing, as we do, with many parts of it, and we find ourselves at a great disadvantage because of the absence from the House of the minister who will have the ultimate responsibility for this new department, the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry.

I remember a few days ago when the minister was supposed to participate in a great economic conference in Newfoundland. With the usual promotion which is one of the characteristics of the Premier of that province, it was announced with great fanfare that on the final day of the conference, which was last Wednesday, the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry, the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion and the Minister of Transport would be present. The Minister of Fisheries and Forestry was not

present because he had to come back to the House of Commons to pilot this legislation through the chamber. Now we find that his presence is not, apparently, of such great importance. Where is he this afternoon? He is in western Canada. He is not attending to any governmental duties. He is attending a conference of the Liberal party in Saskatchewan when he should be in this House attending to his responsibilities and listening to the very reasoned arguments put forward by hon. members who are trying to fulfil their obligations to the people of Canada by making this a good bill.

We remember the experience of a few months ago when the Canada Water Act went through this House. We contended it was bad legislation because it failed to recognize the necessity for a national standard of quality control for clean water. Because this plea went unheeded we shall gradually see the Canada Water Act, which took up so much of the time of the House, pass into oblivion, where it belongs, to be superseded by the legislation we are now putting through and the concomitant legislation which is to accompany it such as the clean air bill and other measures which I am sure the minister will be introducing in connection with his new responsibility for pollution control.

I believe the amendment put forward by my hon. friend will generally improve the bill. With great respect to the President of the Treasury Board, I find it difficult to understand why the government will not accept it. I feel that if the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry were in the House today he would be prepared, as a reasonable man, to listen to the constructive arguments which we have put forward and to accept an amendment which we contend would have the effect of improving the bill. I am genuinely sorry that members of the House did not agree with the proposal put forward by the President of the Treasury Board to stand this part of the bill until the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry is here to take part in the debate. In the absence of the minister, what we are doing now is a useless exercise. With great respect to the President of the Treasury Board, he can never answer the arguments we are putting forward. He does not understand the bill, he has no responsibility for studying this part of its provisions and he will not have the ultimate responsibility of administering it.

**Mr. Peters:** Mr. Chairman, I hope the minister will accept this small amendment. As has been pointed out, a similar provision is made in the air quality legislation. I see a number of members present this afternoon who are interested in controlling the pollution of the Ottawa River, a body of water which is interprovincial. They are well aware that if this effort is to be successful, co-operation will be needed from dozens of municipalities both on the Quebec side and on the Ontario side. It is obvious the minister will be unable to operate on the basis of standards set up separately by Quebec or by Ontario. Not only will there have to be agreement between the provinces as to the desired standard, but co-operation must be forthcoming from the townships concerned. Those responsible for spending money on clean-up plans in Quebec will have to take into account the degree of pollution from the Ontario side, and vice versa.

[Mr. McGrath.]