

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY, S. O. 81—NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Fulton:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should move to complete the national park system (land and marine) by the year 2000 and should implement the recommendation of the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Report) that Canada protect at least 12 percent of land and marine zones.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona): Madam Speaker, one cannot help, when one begins to debate this particular motion before us today, but contrast this day with another day in the life of this Parliament some time ago when all members of Parliament joined together to unanimously pass a motion having to do with the preservation of South Moresby as a national park. That, for me, was one of the finest days certainly in my time as a Member of Parliament. The government of the day, the same government that we have now, saw no threat in the coming together of all members of Parliament behind the particular motion. That makes it all the more mysterious why today the Minister of the Environment rose and opposed the motion which we have before us.

Perhaps just for the record I will read the motion moved by the hon. member for Skeena:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should move to complete the national park system (land and marine) by the year 2000 and should implement the recommendation of the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Report) that Canada protect at least 12 percent of land and marine zones.

All that this motion would do, if it were to be passed, would be to give parliamentary approval to a goal that the government itself up, until today, had not renounced. Indeed, I would suspect that on many occasions it has indicated that this is the government's goal.

So why on earth would the Minister of the Environment not get up and say to the hon. member for Skeena, the environment critic for the New Democratic Party, that this is a motion which he would be glad to have passed. It would certainly be helpful in his relationships with his own department and his bureaucrats, in his

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relationship with the business community and in his relationship with environmentalists—in all those relationships that he has to enter into in order to fulfil these goals which, up until now, we thought were the goals of the government—to have the unanimous support of the Parliament of Canada in doing so.

It sort of boggles the mind to reflect on why the Minister of the Environment would be so intent on not having the backing of Parliament and so intent on destroying his own reputation. Here was an opportunity for him to shine in a way that a previous environment minister, Tom McMillan, had with respect to South Moresby when he agreed that a motion having to do with South Moresby would pass the House. Instead, we have the Minister of the Environment getting up and making a very spurious argument indeed with respect to the fact that this motion is a non-confidence motion.

As I said earlier on a point of order, although Mr. Speaker ruled that it was not something that he wanted to comment on as a point of order, this is only a motion of non-confidence to the extent that the government declares it to be so at the political level. The objective of the McGrath reforms passed in this House in 1985 was to take the language of confidence out of the Standing Orders with respect to supply motions, which had traditionally been, as part of parliamentary tradition, a matter of confidence. This was sort of a lay-over in the language, if you like, because actually opposition days had nothing to do with supply any more. They were simply an opportunity for members of the opposition to move motions. But because they were still under the rubric of supply, the language of confidence had lingered beyond its meaningfulness.

That language was taken out of the Standing Orders precisely so that Private Members, to use the language of the Prime Minister himself when he mandated the McGrath commission, would be able to vote as they chose on matters like opposition days, so that no longer would we have government or opposition members being able to hide behind the language of confidence. In the days before the reform it used to be that opposition members would vote in favour of an opposition motion even though they did not support the substance of the motion because they said they did not want to miss any opportunity to express non-confidence in the govern-