

Weather Modification Identification Act

for Timiskaming was successful in getting the standing committee to adopt.

Earlier this year the hon. member for Timiskaming filed a public bill in his name, Bill C-24, entitled An Act to Govern, License and Regulate the Operation of Rainmaking Equipment in Canada. During the course of session—it was on April 5—the member was given the right to withdraw his bill and have its subject matter referred to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry so that the subject matter of his bill could be considered along with that of Bill S-11. The parliamentary secretary also paid tribute to the interest of the hon. member and the work he has done on the subject. I am happy to have this opportunity, in his absence, to commend him on his concern about this whole question.

As for the change that the parliamentary secretary now proposes, even though I am an opponent of split infinitives and of sentences that end with prepositions, and even though I am a stickler on the proper use of such words as “shall” and “will”, when it comes to this “shall” and “may” business, I feel like the hon. member for South Shore (Mr. Crouse). If we really want it done, I would rather say “shall”. When I am told I shall do something, I do it, but when I am told I may do something, I may not.

Mr. Baldwin: You never do it.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My friend, the House Leader of the Official Opposition, knows there are times when we may decide that we shall do certain things. The parliamentary secretary has made the case that has been made frequently, not only by Dr. Ollivier, but by others over the years, that when we are speaking about things that are done by the crown or even done by the executive in the name of the crown, there are circumstances in which “may” has the force of “shall” even though this is not the case in so far as ordinary mortals are concerned.

I am not sure that I can persuade my friend from Timiskaming on this point. He has a language of his own which he uses effectively. It may be impossible to explain to him that «may» means «shall». However, if the parliamentary secretary and the minister are saying to me by nodding their heads, as I think they are, that the word «may» as the parliamentary secretary wants to put it in the bill will nevertheless require the administrator to make this information public and, in particular, will require the administrator to make available to any member of the public who requests it—I stop because I want to see which way they will move their heads. They are nodding them up and down.

Mr. Davis: The hon. member is on the right track.

Mr. Corbin: May I answer the question raised by the hon. member?

Mr. Speaker: The member may rise on a point of order. I gather he already spoke.

Mr. Corbin: I am attempting to answer the question. If I can do it on a point of order—

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Perhaps the hon. member can ask me a question. He can ask whether I understand such and such.

Mr. Corbin: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member understands extremely well the intent of my amendment and I congratulate him for that.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Thank you for your patience, Mr. Speaker. We have it on the record and that is what is important. At least I will be able to show what has been said to the hon. member for Timiskaming. If this report stage amendment passes, as report stage amendments moved by the government side usually do, it will be clear that the administrator under Bill S-11, known as the Weather Modification Information Act, does not have an option. He must make public the information referred to in clause 5 and, in particular, when any member of the public makes a request for that information, it shall be made available to him.

Mr. Corbin: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I assure the hon. member that such will be the case. However, I must also tell him at the same time that the information will be made available to the public on request, as long as it does not contravene some other legislation.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I suppose that applies to any statute. I hope it is not like the payments to the Wheat Board under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. I hope there will be no repetition of our experience in connection with that legislation. The word “shall” is used in that act, and look at what happened. Perhaps we are better off with “may” than with “shall”. At any rate this point has been cleared up. I shall get in touch with my hon. friend from Temiskaming and try to persuade him that what he wants is what the bill requires. I am glad to note that the information obtained by the administrator under this act will be available.

• (3:40 p.m.)

Mr. Baldwin: May I ask the parliamentary secretary a question? I understand the distinction between “shall” and “may”; as my hon. friend from South Shore (Mr. Crouse) has said, this party has always been concerned that there should be the fullest possible disclosure of information. To this end there is a bill on the order paper, Bill C-250—by chance it happens to be in my own name—calling for public disclosure. It is modelled on the legislation in the United States and in Scandinavia which provides that the onus is on the government to make a case when it wishes to refuse information. Can I have an assurance from the parliamentary secretary that, having examined this bill, he will be prepared to give it reasonable support.

Mr. Speaker: I have to bring to the hon. member's attention that the parliamentary secretary has already spoken. Perhaps the question might be asked and answered in other circumstances, for example, tomorrow during the question period.

Is the House ready for the question?

Motion (Mr. Corbin) agreed to.

Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of the Environment and Minister of Fisheries) moved that Bill S-11, to provide for obtaining of information respecting weather modification activities, as reported (with amendments) from the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry be concurred in.