

Government Organization Act, 1970

mills should be required to operate a recycling process so that they poured no water back into the river, lake or stream systems of the nation. These pulp mills, he said, would have to extract within the plant, or break down by a bio-degrading processes, the chemicals and toxic substances which were present, and they could only add water to replenish the amount absorbed by evaporation, absorption and natural processes of that kind. Because this statement was made apropos the new fisheries legislation, and because Buckley Valley Forest Industries is proposing an operation which is not now in existence, we are entitled to know whether the declaration by the minister represents a requirement to be imposed upon the company and upon other plants from now on. Will it, in fact, be a requirement when the chips are down and when the legislation is enacted?

The procedure used yesterday by the parliamentary secretary to deny this information to the people in the area concerned, to those who live downstream from the site of this proposed new pulp mill, to those who are up in arms over this issue, runs completely contrary to the intentions of Parliament, the expectations of Parliament and to the proposition which was put to Parliament by the minister when the amendments to the Fisheries Act were introduced. These considerations must apply, I submit, with regard to the legislation now before us. The present attitude is not good enough morally, bearing in mind the obligations the government have to the people of Canada. The moral obligation to people is what we can best rely on, I suppose. To use vague phraseology about initiating and undertaking measures for pollution control, without spelling out the substance of the ideas and programs which do exist, amounts to asking once more for a blank cheque approach, namely, for a general endorsement by Parliament couched in legal phraseology. When it comes down to the fine print, we discover that the cabinet fails to fulfil the trust placed in it by Parliament or its obligations in terms of the national structure.

In passing, I believe I can justifiably contend against the assertion by the President of the Treasury Board that the inclusion of the word "national" in the provision concerning standards would narrow the authority of the minister. I submit that just the reverse is true and that the minister is using a superficial argument which is not borne out by the facts. Surely, as everyone seems to be agreed, the question of controlling our environment, of preserving the ecology in which we find ourselves, of preserving nature and perhaps human life itself into the bargain, is of such importance that it must be considered national in scope. It should not be undertaken in such a way as to produce one set of standards in one province and another set of standards in another province, or one of set of standards in one municipal area and a different set in another. Surely, we ought to think in terms of a national concept, a national goal.

We have just completed a federal-provincial conference on the subject of the constitution. Full disclosure of what went on at that conference has not been made to Parliament or to the people of Canada, but it is to be hoped that had the government felt it lacked sufficient constitu-

[Mr. Howard (Skeena).]

tional authority under the British North America Act to cope with this issue of pollution it would have asked for agreement from the provinces to cloak itself with that authority. But even apart from this, assuming there is some difficulty in the constitution which would make legislation by the federal government ultra vires should it seek to establish itself in a national field, there is nothing whatever to prevent Parliament from declaring that it is interested in the national scene, that the standards which are established should be national in scope and inviting the provinces to accept them.

Clause six provides that the minister, in pursuance of his obligations, powers and authority under clause 5, is able to co-operate with provincial agencies or with any other agencies or bodies having objectives similar to his own. If we were to establish a national standard there would be no difficulty about saying to the provinces: here is an area which we have carved out in the national interest and we suggest you take this standard and put it into effect. This is what we did in connection with the Hospital and Diagnostic Services Act. This is what we did in connection with the medicare legislation. We established national requirements and said to the provinces: If you want to participate in this program these are the criteria you have to meet. This is all we are asking by virtue of the insertion of one simple word "national" in the text of this bill. For the minister to say that this would narrow the field and limit his scope to put these ideas into full effect is spurious reasoning and should be rejected. There must be a national concern and a national objective, not a requirement which can be one thing in one part of the nation and, according to the pressures exercised, something else in another part of the nation.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): I wish to speak briefly on the amendment to add the word "national" before "objectives and standards" because I feel an important issue is at stake. Unfortunately, the President of the Treasury Board was not able to deal with it convincingly. I am not trying to detract from his performance in any way, because obviously he is operating under difficulty in an area with which he is not personally acquainted.

The other day we were confronted with a definite example of the need to set a national standard for use in pollution control. In this case I refer specifically to air pollution. In many of our urban centres today, as a result of the increasing emission of noxious gases by industry and transport traffic, air pollution reaches such a peak at times that whole areas become almost unfit for habitation. Those who live or work in Montreal know only too well the situation which occurs when, because of a weather condition known as inversion, the pollution level rises above a certain point. On the occasion I have in mind it goes to about .4 parts per million which, as I understand it, is close to the point where a city becomes uninhabitable, particularly by those subject to respiratory diseases.

On the first really bad day, I asked the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry what steps were being taken by