

Government Orders

The way in which this government has dealt with the Oldman dam, its refusal to put into place the means of mitigation, its refusal to deal with the illegal activity of the Alberta government, its refusal to deal honestly and fairly and squarely with the Peigan Band does not stand the government, or indeed the democratic process in this country, in good stead.

So, while my party rises today to support Bill C-59, while we are delighted that this is what we have in front of us, I must say that I do wish this country could come to the point where it deals with all aboriginal peoples on the same basis.

Let the agreement with the Cree of Fort Chipewyan and the Haïda stand as the model that we would look to. Let us hope that never again will we have a black mark on our history such as that which occurred yesterday in the case of the Oldman dam.

Madam Speaker, we support this bill as amended.

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak on Bill C-59. It is a piece of legislation that has taken a long time to get here.

As someone who is often highly partisan in debate in this House, it is an occasion on which I do not feel there is any need to be partisan at all. We have heard from the Liberal member from LaSalle—Émard. We have heard from the minister's parliamentary secretary.

In relation to Gwaii Haanas, it is worth reflecting for a moment on a number of extremely non-partisan and highly Canadian events that have taken place.

This Chamber just more than five years ago passed the unanimous resolution to work with the Haïda Nation in setting aside South Moresby. The former Minister of the Environment, Tom McMillan, worked extraordinarily hard to make it become a reality. Canada's present Prime Minister did an extraordinarily good job in negotiating with the then premier of British Columbia, Bill Vander Zalm, and with the president of the Council of Haïda Nations, Miles Richardson, in bringing together the three levels of government: Canada, British Columbia and the Haïda Nation, and setting aside an area that

more than three million Canadians had expressed interest in having set aside.

The Prime Minister's office received several hundred thousand letters from Quebec, Ontario, the western provinces, the territories and the maritimes. Support from all over the world was focused on this unique area, which, as other members have made clear, was recognized by the United Nations more than a decade ago in terms of Ninstints, a very small area down off the southern tip of the archipelago.

• (1030)

It really is a remarkable area, often called the Canadian Galapagos, that missed the last glaciation. It was one of the most heavily inhabited areas of the whole west coast of North America until very recent times. There were communities of several thousand throughout the Gwaii Haanas archipelago which regrettably were wiped out. The Haïda nation was almost entirely wiped out by measles and smallpox just 100 years ago.

It is significant that such an agreement was ultimately reached. I think it is probably the crowning environmental achievement of the present Prime Minister. I hope the present Minister of Environment will very soon find the opportunity to potlatch in relation to Gwaii Haanas, in relation to what is often called South Moresby National Park Reserve. It is very important that this matter be ultimately brought not only into being but also into a co-operative understanding between the two principal nations now involved: Canada and the Council of the Haïda Nation.

It is a tribute today to the minister and to those officials who have worked hard behind the scenes to get wording that has been found to be co-operatively acceptable between the Council of the Haïda Nation and Canada. It is also a tribute to the elders, to the chiefs, to Miles Richardson, to Guujaw and others who worked so long right until I understand one of the officials received a call from Miles this morning. I spoke to him at five this morning.

It is a piece of legislation that should be passed today. I am sure there are many members who want to speak on it, but the importance of passing it so that the agreement can in fact come into being should not be overlooked by any members of this House.