

Proposed Committee on Pollution

quote a noted authority in this field, Mr. F. H. Finnis, who states:

The provinces should take primary responsibility for pollution control because, constitutionally, it is their field.

As we can see, there are many government departments involved and there are various levels of government involved. At present there is no body which co-ordinates these various aspects of pollution control. It is for this reason that I have suggested a house committee. I feel that at present the problem of pollution control is dealt with in its various aspects by various departments at various levels of government, and we have nothing which brings these various aspects together and focuses attention on them as a whole. This is particularly important. There is a need for a committee of this house to devote itself to this task, and to this task alone.

It is suggested that perhaps there are other committees of the house which are capable of examining the various aspects of pollution control and therefore there is no need for another committee. I submit to you, sir, that many of the things now done by other committees, should be done by a single committee on pollution, and would be done better. This committee might have representatives from, say, the fisheries committee, the health and welfare committee, or any other committee of this house. I am not concerned with its composition at this stage. My suggestion is that a single committee can focus attention on this problem of pollution control. With it we would then be better able to make the extremely important decisions on resource allocation which the whole question of pollution control requires.

● (5:10 p.m.)

Although some people feel there are already too many committees, a further committee would in no way result in any overlapping or duplication of the work of civil servants who at present testify before other committees on the subject of pollution. What should happen is that instead of testifying before these many committees, members of the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources would have to testify before only one committee. I think this is an important consideration and might save time. Certainly there might be a saving of the very expensive time of government civil servants, and for that reason alone I think it well worth considering.

The argument that in some way a committee of this nature would get into what is a

[Mr. Anderson.]

provincial jurisdiction and thus cause friction with the provinces is, I think, also fallacious. It is true that this committee would be able to summon any witness and make any report that it feels necessary. In no way would it be restricted entirely to the consideration of aspects within federal jurisdiction. The committee can suggest, for instance, that in a certain area of pollution control nothing should be done without the co-operation of the provinces, and that therefore the federal government take the steps necessary to co-operate with the provinces to achieve a certain end. I cannot see any real problem about this committee interfering in areas of provincial jurisdiction.

I do not think we need at this time go into the details of how the committee would be set up and who would decide its terms of reference.

I should like to sum up my remarks by saying that the problem of pollution exists and I think all Canadians are now becoming aware of that fact. But that is not what I am trying to demonstrate here today. What I am saying is that a committee of this house, which would have the opportunity of calling witnesses and of travelling to various parts of the country to observe pollution problems that might have been caused by industrial exploitation or by any other circumstance, would perform a useful function. I cannot accept the arguments that this would interfere with the functions of other committees or that it would be an interference in a provincial jurisdiction.

Therefore I hope that those who follow me in this debate will limit themselves to discussing the pros and cons of establishing such a committee. If they do this with maximum dispatch then perhaps we can come to a vote on the matter this afternoon and recommend to the government that the setting up of such a committee be considered.

Hon. Hugh John Flemming (Carleton-Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, I rise particularly because I want to express my support for what the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Anderson) has said this afternoon in connection with this very important matter. I am quite prepared to vote for his motion if it comes to a vote, and I will be glad to give further support if he will follow this through with a later motion, or take whatever course he chooses, in order to bring about a very desirable improvement in the pollution situation that exists all over Canada.