

● (2:20 p.m.)

Mr. Benjamin: We need national standards in the field of pollution control to prevent differences of this sort occurring. Surely, the jurisdictional argument for not doing something is no longer valid. It is time for this government to start acting and stop speaking. As my leader said a few moments ago, we have only had motherhood speeches. Everyone agrees we must do something about pollution. There is no argument on that. However, we want to know how, how much and when. We do not want a bill containing motherhood clauses that are so wishywashy and weak that the minister is unable to effect, enforce and ensure pollution control and the clean-up of our air and water.

I hope members opposite will support this amendment and persuade the minister to accept it. In that way, members opposite will not be constrained to vote against that amendment. I hope they will express some support for this kind of approach and this amendment.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): The President of the Treasury Board is always very meticulous and careful in his pronouncements. He always ensures that the language he uses is precise and does not lend itself to misinterpretation. Before lunch, the minister deliberately indicated something to the committee that was not in accordance with the truth of the situation. When we inquired before lunch about the whereabouts of the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry, the President of the Treasury Board stated that the minister was having some transportation difficulties and hoped to be here this afternoon. At the opening of the session this afternoon, the President of the Treasury Board stated he had learned over the lunch hour that the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry could not be here this afternoon. As regretful as that is, perhaps we should let the matter stand and proceed to another part of the bill.

I just had a conversation with some one in the office of the minister of Fisheries and Forestry. I was told, and I am sure that the President of the Treasury Board knows, that the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry, by previous decision of the cabinet, is in Saskatchewan today to take part in the opening of the winter games. Although the minister knew that this bill would be before the committee today, he did not bother to cancel his other engagements. Members of the cabinet are in various parts of Saskatchewan today, partly as a publicity program and partly in conjunction with the opening of the games. By direct instruction of the cabinet, the minister is in Biggar. He is scheduled to be in Regina tomorrow, then Moose Jaw, returning to Ottawa on Sunday.

I am sure that the President of the Treasury Board does not want to leave the impression with the committee that it was through accident or inadvertence that the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry was not able to be here. The President of the Treasury Board should briefly indicate the circumstances, so this country will know that the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry had no intention of being here today, although he knew the bill would be

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discussed because the Government House Leader indicated that this would be the first item today. Members of the cabinet knew that the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry would not be here today. It is not an accident, but a deliberate absence, and at a time when the minister should be dealing with public business. The President of the Treasury Board stated that, in dealing with the legislation before us, we should be concerned with the objectives and not the details. He stated that we should be concerned with the construction and the broad general outlines, not the specifics of the program. According to the minister, this is the orderly way to do things.

On previous occasions when the government has introduced legislation, it has misled the House by following courses of action not contemplated at the time which nullified the understanding the House had about the manner in which we would deal with that legislation. I wish to give an example of this. Amendments to the Fisheries Act dealt with in the last session contained the provision that before industry could get approval to build a new plant, it had to file with the minister or the department plans and specifications for pollution and environmental control measures. The purpose was to ensure that the provisions of the Fisheries Act were followed by the industrial plant. Because this was a matter of public concern, an undertaking was given that the plans and specifications would be available to the public so that they would be aware of what the industry planned to do in terms of meeting the general objectives of the Fisheries Act.

Yesterday, I moved a motion for the tabling of plans and specifications submitted to the Department of Fisheries and Forestry pursuant to the Fisheries Act relating to pollution control and engineering matters. These Plans related to the Buckley Valley Forest Industries Limited proposed pulp mill in Houston, British Columbia. Contrary to the intent of the act, the parliamentary secretary stated that the government had no intention of making them public or disclosing this information. He stated that the plans and specifications are the private property of Buckley Valley Forest Industries Limited. The intent of the law was to do the opposite.

The President of the Treasury Board has now asked us to follow the same procedure, namely give blanket approval to the vaguely worded bill before us and leave the implementation of it to the cabinet. Then, the minister could deal with these plans in secret, keeping the public from knowing what is taking place other than what might be revealed in press releases issued from time to time.

● (2:30 p.m.)

I have read a press release of the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry and have heard him when he was interviewed over television. As far as the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry is concerned, speaking for argument's sake now about the pulp mills in particular, the hon. gentleman expressed the opinion that any water used in such a project should be kept within the plant; that pulp