

*Government Orders*

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am of course very pleased to be able today to begin the second reading debate on Bill C-29, the bill which establishes a federal Department of forestry.

The introduction of this bill today as the first item of business is perhaps a statement of the importance that our government attaches to forestry generally and in all its manifestations.

This is not entirely an historic event. Perhaps it should be pointed out that in fact what I am doing here this afternoon is not new. In June 1960, the then Prime Minister, the Right Hon. John George Diefenbaker, rose in the House to introduce a similar bill which also established a federal department of forestry. He said at the time that if we are to increase our production and if forest devastation is to be overcome, research will be needed.

On July 11, 1960, 29 years ago, the House gave second and third readings to the bill which was, incidentally, passed unanimously. Royal Assent was given on August 1, and almost 29 years ago to the day, on October 1, the bill was proclaimed and the department began functioning.

Forestry was not a partisan issue then and ought not to be today. That is perhaps another reason why it is introduced as the first item of business. It is intended to establish the atmosphere that will be required by this House over the next few months as we deal with other equally important and critical issues.

Nevertheless, it is instructive to review what happened subsequently, since I assume that some of my opposition critics will be responding to what I am saying. The Right Hon. Lester B. Pearson spoke strongly in favour of the bill in 1960. He said that there can be no question about the importance to this country of forestry and the forest industries, or indeed of the desirability of the government doing everything it can to support and strengthen that industry. Yet, tragically, six years later when he was Prime Minister, he and his ministers began to plan the demise of the new department of forestry, and they effected the near demise of the once proud Canadian forestry service.

It started by moving forestry to a new department called rural development. I suppose that set in motion the kind of attitude that you and I, Mr. Speaker, found when we came here in the early 1970s; namely, that

forestry was an activity like agriculture, that it was a sort of rural unsophisticated kind of endeavour, that it ought to be transferred to the Third World and that we were, after all, a nation in search of a much more modern image, so forestry needed to be relegated to something else.

In 1968 it was shunted off to the department of fisheries and forestry. Finally, two years after that, in 1971, forestry disappeared altogether into the bowels of a newly formed Department of the Environment. In the years that followed, 50 per cent of the entire person-year strength of the Canadian forestry service was phased out. I will speak a bit about the earlier history of the Canadian forestry service and forestry generally, but this more recent history is important to place in proper context what I am sure my friends in the opposition will be saying here today.

There is little to record in the way of forest management in Canada up to the time of Confederation. Shortly thereafter, a forest conservation movement began to organize itself in our country. The forests of eastern Canada were being subjected to devastating misuse, and these are words that were used by some eminent spokesmen of the time. By 1883, the loss of beech, maple, oak and basswood was so shocking that the Ontario government commissioned a report entitled "The Necessity of Preserving and Replanting Forests". John Croumbie Brown wrote in 1884 about the injurious effects on the Canadian climate which he attributed to the excessive clearing of our forests.

• (1520)

In the same decade a century ago, William Saunders was advocating reforestation, warning of the disastrous consequences of a dearth of timber in Canada. He said it would be difficult to describe. Saunders said that at first sight, forests appeared to the settlers of a wooded country as obstacles to advancing civilization, to be removed as rapidly as possible, with unwearied zeal and persistence in the use of the axe and fire to remove these encumbrances at a rapid pace.

Saunders described in eloquent terms 110 years ago what now seems to be clear to everyone. He described the effects of deforestation. Shelter against storm is lost, he said, temperature and moisture are not moderated and the air is not purified. Winds are not arrested, forests exercise a governing and conservative influence