

Government Organization

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Chairman, I have listened to the arguments of the hon. gentleman who preceded me. He seemed to advance them with a certain amount of diffidence. He started off powerfully and ended up almost apologetically. His final words were to the effect that any amendment of this kind would weaken the powers of the department. I find it difficult to understand that argument.

The hon. gentleman referred also to the fact that the members of the opposition were dodging the question of the ownership of offshore mineral rights. The present government of Canada has done just that. The question of mineral rights should not have been submitted to the Supreme Court of Canada. It should have been decided in a truly national way after discussion and consideration at a conference with the various provinces. Instead of that being done the government wanted to get away from its responsibility to make a decision, a course it has followed during the three years it has been in office.

I have a high regard for the minister, but as I listened to his argument to the effect that of the north will strengthen the administrative by arbitrary lines the various areas of the great resources to which he referred I must say that I felt it was indeed one of the most unusual arguments I have ever heard. The government is going to say to one minister, this part of the sea is your jurisdiction, and to another minister, this part of the sea is your jurisdiction. Let me suggest that this government needs no assistance so far as being at sea is concerned. I cannot understand what is behind the attitude taken by members on the government side toward this amendment. I would have thought it would be accepted as a serious endeavour to strengthen the department.

I listened with tremendous interest to the minister as he paid warm words of tribute to the Pine Point Railway development.

Mr. Laing: I was trying to hatch your vision.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I am very glad to find there has been a change of attitude on the part of the minister opposite. When we went ahead with this proposition the Liberals ridiculed it as another example of the weakness of the vision of northern development. That which was heresy when we were in office is now embraced by the present government as an example of its wise foresight in bringing the development of the north to fruition.

[Mr. Davis.]

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Diefenbaker: We remember the immortal words of the Prime Minister when the Conservative party spoke of the new northern development. He said: What are they going to do, build roads and railroads from igloo to igloo? There is always hope when there is recognition of wrongdoing, however late. There is always hope for those who adopt that attitude. Imagine the change that took place. They ridiculed this vision and said it was a nightmare. We went ahead in the face of the most bitter criticism on the part of the Liberal opposition of that day and proceeded with the development of the north. The people of northern Canada realize that it is in consequence of our actions that tremendous mineral developments are taking place in the north.

The reference made by the minister to the Pine Point development was what one might call a tribute in reverse. He now admits that the reason he mentioned it without specifically paying a tribute was to assure to the Conservative party a subtle compliment. He hid that compliment very well when he spoke.

Speaking of development, what is going to happen when one minister is in charge of one portion of the sea and another in charge of another portion? Why does the government establish this division and what is behind it? Where is the incumbent minister of this department? Is he away today on some political harangue? Why is he not here when this whole matter is being considered? What possible excuse can there be for his absence?

Mr. Laing: Mr. Chairman, I rise on a point of order. I know the right hon. gentleman would not wish to leave the impression with anyone that he was unfairly attacking a minister. The minister in question today is in Winnipeg attending a meeting of the resource ministers council of Canada making plans for a convention on the subject of pollution to be held in the city of Montreal in November. I am sure this convention will be of tremendous value to Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Chairman, I am sure that indicates how little hon. members opposite have upon which to base their applause when they pound their desks in the manner they have. The place for a minister when a matter dealing with his responsibility is before parliament is here in the house. I