

*Government Organization Act, 1970*

• (3:20 p.m.)

So, Mr. Chairman, it seems to me that there is a clear distinction between what is envisaged in subclause (a) and subclause (b), and to suggest that the insertion of the word "national" in subclause (a) would restrict the powers of the minister to work with provincial agencies under the terms of subclause (b) is arrant nonsense. That is why I suggest that the minister has not read it, or he is trying to draw red herrings into the debate. I fail to understand the minister's viewpoint, Mr. Chairman.

I heard the President of the Treasury Board speaking on these matters long before the introduction of this bill. Why is there this extreme reluctance on the part of the government of which he is a member to introduce national controls in terms of national standards? The minister may recall that in 1966 a conference was called in Montreal under the auspices of the Council of Resource Ministers. His colleague who is now the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce was the minister who had responsibility in this area at that time. I was one of the few members of the House who took the trouble to go down, to register and attend that conference. I remember making a speech in this chamber not long after the conference was over. I gave a summary of the conclusions of the conference and quoted the guidelines suggested by it, guidelines which had reference to air pollution, water pollution and soil pollution. The conference was divided into those areas.

I quoted the recommendations that more or less delineated the areas of responsibility that might be assumed federally and provincially in respect of the battle against all three areas of pollution. The conference recommended unanimously that one of the basic responsibilities of the federal government ought to be the initiation of national standards of quality for air, water and soil. Mr. Chairman, those at the conference represented people from one end of Canada to the other; it was one of the most representative conferences ever held. There were experts in various fields of science, particularly biological science. There were representatives of the federal government and of the Fisheries Research Board. There were municipal representatives and senior officials of the public service of all the provinces. There were municipal legal advisers. There were representatives of industry and of conservation groups from across the country.

Out of all the mix and exchange of ideas there emerged, above all else, one concept—that the role of the federal government should be in the establishment of national standards of quality. I remember very well what a top management person in the pulp and paper industry said. He was part of the group I was in. He said that while they recognized that cleaning up the pulp and paper industry of Canada would cost money, and while it was true that no businessman liked to spend money that would not bring any direct return on the profit side, nevertheless so far as they were concerned if they could be assured that they would not be placed at a competitive disadvantage with people in other parts of the country they would buy the idea; they would clean up the

[Mr. Barnett.]

effluent being discharged into the air and water from the pulp and paper industry.

That was the basic theme that emerged from the conference attended by representatives of science and industry. To my knowledge, in that industrial group there were highly placed people from the pulp and paper industry from the Pacific as well as from the eastern parts of Canada. That was the consensus and that was the feeling one obtained from talking to senior people in the public service of the provinces, people who were speaking frankly and off the record, so to speak, so far as any direct quotation of their words was concerned. That consensus was reflected in the guidelines that emanated from the conference. Yet here we are in 1971 and we are discussing a bill to set up, among other things, a department of the environment. As the hon. member for South Western Nova suggested, the minister who is to head the department has said that he believes in national standards. Nevertheless, the President of the Treasury Board has presented his argument. Earlier in the exchange, which I will not go into, he said that he did not think we had attended any cabinet meeting. I have been wondering whether he attended the cabinet meeting at which was discussed the government's support of this bill and whether he knew that the attitude of the minister who is to head this department is that there should be national standards in Canada.

I submit, Mr. Chairman, that when the President of the Treasury Board suggests that this amendment would restrict in any way the powers and duties of the minister of the department to deal co-operatively with the provinces, he is speaking arrant nonsense. We are in no way attempting to insert anything in subclause (b) which would do that. We are trying to suggest that the bill should clearly set out that so far as the activities of the federal government are concerned, the responsible minister should have the green light to provide leadership in the setting of national standards and objectives respecting the quality of the environment in Canada. I cannot understand why the President of the Treasury Board should object to that kind of concept being included in the bill, particularly when it was stated to the House by the minister who ought to be here to deal with policy questions involved in amendments of this kind.

**Mr. Harding:** Mr. Chairman, this amendment is of such vital importance that I think the minister's reply of a few moments ago cannot go unchallenged. I wish to make two or three points. The minister is trying to make out that we are trying to strap provincial authorities. I do not know whom he is trying to kid. He has apparently fooled the members of his own party but he is not kidding any of the opposition members or the general public.

The bill we are dealing with is federal legislation. We cannot legislate for the provinces. We cannot legislate pollution standards for the provinces of this nation and the minister knows it. Yet he stood up and said we will strap the provincial authorities if we include "national" in the clause. I have never heard such unmitigated nonsense. The argument just does not hold water—but a great many things which this Liberal government has