

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): You cannot explain it to someone who does not want to understand.

Mr. Comeau: The hon. member for St. Boniface never understands.

Mr. McGrath: He only speaks from his seat; that is where his brains are.

Mr. Comeau: He did not participate in the debate on the Canada Water Act.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): That was because you people took up all the time.

Mr. Comeau: That is the reason he does not know the arguments that were presented. On that occasion the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry had all kinds of arguments to defeat our proposals. Now he is adopting one of our main proposals. He is advocating national standards—but I think he is just talking that way to the Canadian public. He does not really mean it because the President of the Treasury Board, speaking for the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry this afternoon, does not want to accept this type of amendment. I cannot understand the President of the Treasury Board talking about infringement of provincial jurisdiction and all that sort of stuff. The Minister of Fisheries spoke in favour of national standards. He got headlines in all the newspapers; it was on the front page of every newspaper in Canada. The minister was being really tough, but now the government is backing away. I ask the minister or his parliamentary secretary to explain the reasons why the government does not want to accept this amendment.

Mr. Drury: Mr. Chairman, if the hon. gentleman understood that I was against national standards and was opposing the amendment for that reason, this is clearly a misunderstanding. I think in my earlier remarks I said that the Minister of Fisheries, and indeed the government highly favours the creation and adoption of national standards. There are, however, other fields in which standards would be useful and those are areas which at the moment are exclusively under provincial jurisdiction. I think that we as Canadians are interested in seeing that standards are adopted for areas which are under provincial jurisdiction and we know that the minister would wish to promote and encourage the adoption of such standards. He also would wish, as the hon. member for Peace River indicated, to encourage and promote the adoption of international standards. If one limits him to purely national standards, I suggest this tends to obviate at least the responsibility for promoting and encouraging the adoption of both international standards and provincial or local standards.

I understand the argument that the adoption of national standards is important and the minister has publicly recognized this. He continues to feel that it is important. Indeed, the wording now in the clause would enable him to accomplish fully those purposes that he has indicated, and nothing would be added by the proposed amendment to the achievement of the objectives that he has stated.

Government Organization Act, 1970

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Chairman, I must object to that misinterpretation which I think has been quite innocent.

Mr. McGrath: There was nothing innocent about that.

Mr. Baldwin: It is either ignorance or innocence and I prefer to say innocent in the circumstances. One of my colleagues has said that the minister's argument was a red herring. Mr. Chairman, it was more like the dead mackerel that shines and smells at moonlight. I stated categorically that in my judgment, within the next few years it will be almost inevitable that international agreements will be entered into. This being the case, I asked what will be the authority of the federal government to implement agreed international standards.

If the federal government is left in the position it is in now with respect to international labour arrangements and the implementation of the United Nations' human rights code, we will be in very serious trouble. But if we make it absolutely plain, be setting national standards, that the federal government has a right to set those standards, as advocated by the amendment, then at a later stage the federal government will be in a position to implement international standards: it will not have to go to each of the ten provinces—and some day there may be 11—and say: Here is the agreement we have signed. It is deemed imperative as a result of international negotiations that these international standards be established. The federal government would have to ask Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and so on to pass legislation to implement those standards. I believe the hon. member is trying by his amendment to obviate that and put the federal government in a position where it will be easier for it, having established its right to set national standards, to implement international agreements.

Mr. Barnett: Mr. Chairman, as I listen to this discussion it becomes more and more obvious to me that the President of the Treasury Board is either clutching at red herrings in an endeavour to dredge up some argument against the amendment or he has not read clause 6 of the bill. It may be a mixture of both. Clause 6 has two subparagraphs. Clause 6(a), to which the amendment refers, clearly states:

initiate, recommend and undertake programs, and co-ordinate programs of the government of Canada, that are designed to promote the establishment or adoption of objectives or standards—

If the government of Canada through its various agencies and programs is not interested in encouraging the promotion of national standards, then what is the purpose of having a national government? I felt that in his exchange with the hon. member for Peace River the minister was trying to introduce a constitutional cloak or smokescreen by suggesting that the insertion of the word "national" into clause 6(a) would restrict the application of the bill. Clause 6(b) refers to the idea of the minister working with other agencies, and in particular provincial governments, to "promote and encourage the institution of practices and conduct leading to the better protection and enhancement of environmental quality".