

Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have the opportunity to make some comments now, and later to move an amendment which has already been moved at the report stage but which Your Honour felt would be better moved at third reading. I make these comments because of the unavoidable absence of the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt), who has done such a notable and yeoman service to this House and the country by his contributions on this subject both in the House and in committee.

It is not my intention to delay this bill since it is designed to prevent pollution of the Arctic waters adjacent to the mainland and the islands of the Canadian Arctic. We unanimously recorded our vote in support of this bill in April. I should like to think that was a great day for Canada, a day when Canadians stood together and in effect said to the rest of the world, "We are not satisfied that international law can safeguard the delicate ecology of the north, and until it can and does we have to take affairs into our own hands".

In recent times in this House and outside we have heard the Post Office described as a sleeping giant, though possibly the Postmaster General (Mr. Kierans) may not wish to make that comment at the present time. We have heard the Arctic described as a sleeping giant, and I might as well go on record as saying that the world is a sleeping giant when it comes to the question of pollution. But when even this government and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) can rub the sleep out of their eyes, then perhaps in the refreshing dawn of enlightenment the world can take encouragement that people everywhere will be sufficiently roused so that in the future countries like Canada will not be forced to take the law into their own hands to deal with pollution. This is what Canada is doing now in this bill.

It is unfortunate that we have been forced into this action. I hope that our concern will act as an example to the rest of the world, and that man may soon cry for a halt in his race to self-destruction through pollution and environmental breakdown. I believe, as do other members of our party, that our legislation respecting pollution is a patchwork and crazy quilt effort. Because of this it is desirable, indeed imperative, to bring all efforts and measures to combat pollution under the coordination of one department or agency which, in keeping with the governmental language of the 1970's could be called Environment Canada.

[Mr. Chrétien.]

This piece of legislation, Bill C-202, originated with the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. We have other legislation involving the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, the Department of Fisheries and Forestry, the Department of Transport as well as other departments that wish to get into the act. There are too many holes in Canada's antipollution net and I, for one, do not wish to be shunted from one minister to another minister, from one department to another department and from one bureaucrat to another bureaucrat, to find out who is doing what, when and how to control and combat the pollution menace. I wish to see one minister responsible, one department involved. I wish to know that our questions may be directed to him and that the concern of the people of Canada may be made known to that minister and his department or agency.

The world has reached a stage when scientists question our very future and predict possible environmental breakdown. This stage has been reached because there has been no global vision; even now it may be too late, but I believe we must project ourselves into the future if only to build our defences against any possible catastrophe that may eventually overtake all of us.

We have discussed at length the sovereignty issue. The history of events in this House, and statements made by the Prime Minister and others outside the House, indicate beyond the shadow of a doubt that the government has been and is reluctant to make any clear, unequivocal statement regarding Canada's traditional claims to possession of the lands, waters and ice of the Arctic. I do not understand why there needs to be or why there should be such a mental block. I do not understand why even the Prime Minister, in announcing this piece of legislation, found it necessary to say, and I quote:

This is the first bit of legislation—it is not an assertion of sovereignty, it is an exercise of our desire to keep the Arctic free of pollution and by defining 100 miles as the zone within which we are determined to act, we are indicating that our assertion there is not one aimed toward sovereignty but aimed toward one of the very important aspects of our action in the Arctic.

My hope is that the government will make a strong statement on the Arctic sovereignty issue. Perhaps it has that in mind and that was the reason the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) made his statement in this House on April 16. I shall refer to this later when I put my amendment