

Northern Inland Waters Bill

that on second reading we ought not to be discussing individual clauses of the bill. I hope hon. members will limit their contributions to debate on the principles of the bill and the amendment which is before the House.

Mr. Nesbitt: I appreciate Your Honour's point of view and, of course, I agree with it. But perhaps Your Honour did not hear the observation I was just making. My reference to this particular clause illustrates the reason for the substance of the amendment presently before the House. It reads, if I may cite it, with Your Honour's permission:

For the purposes of this act, diversion of waters from a water course, whether the water course is seasonal or otherwise, and obstruction of any such water course shall be deemed to constitute uses of waters.

I quote this only to illustrate the reason for bringing an amendment before the House. We are concerned lest rivers flowing into the Arctic, as the majority of the rivers in this country do, either into the Arctic seas or into Hudson Bay, might be diverted to flow south into the Great Lakes or perhaps into other river systems such as the Columbia, in which case this clause might afford an opportunity for selling our waters in the absence of proper discussion or consultation with the Canadian public or, indeed, without their knowing about it.

This may not, of course, be the intention of the government. But over the years, as I say, one does become a little suspicious about these things, particularly when there does seem to be disagreement in cabinet circles as to what our water policy should be. As far as I am concerned, if the minister, when he closes the debate, would give the House an assurance that it is not the intention of the government to make use of this clause for the purpose I have suggested, and would agree to recommend an appropriate amendment making a declaration at the time, perhaps during the committee stage, we would be quite prepared to withdraw our amendment and allow the bill to pass on division. As has been pointed out, we have other objections to the terms of the bill. Otherwise, we must continue with our amendment.

As the bill stands, we object strongly to a measure which would permit the diversion of Canadian waters without the opportunity for a thorough and full discussion of the long range implications, particularly when government policy, like its attitude toward the Arctic sovereignty question, is uncertain, con-

[Mr. Speaker.]

tradictory and indecisive. With these remarks I close my observations and await what the minister has to say.

Mr. Rod Thomson (Battleford-Kindersley): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the minister and the hon. member that they will not have to wait very long. As I understand the purport of this bill, it is to set up regional water authorities in the Northwest Territories and in the Yukon. When we were discussing the water bill some time ago, I recall wondering whether there was not a certain amount of duplication as between the provincial and the federal water authorities in connection with pollution especially. There seems a similar possibility here.

There may be good reason for setting up these organizations in the long run, though I am not certain what it is at the moment. The minister in the course of his statement on the bill told the House that action of the kind proposed should not be taken half-heartedly. If he is disposed to view things in this light, if he intends to apply these measures vigorously and forcibly, I am quite pleased to go along with a bill of this nature.

● (8:20 p.m.)

However, I should like to suggest that those with responsibility in a local sense in these two areas be given co-operation so they are allowed to exercise some authority. I do not think anyone can learn how to govern without having the chance to do some governing. I should like to see the minister extend more authority in fields such as this so that a more vigorous and forceful contribution can be made. In this case perhaps the people concerned would be less subject to temptation from outside sources than would be the case in some other fields.

I am in favour of the amendment moved by the Conservative Party in the sense that I do not think we should, at least at this stage, allow the exportation of our water. I am not quite sure where water from the Northwest Territories would be exported to, unless it were to Alaska. That might be a possibility if the Yukon River were dammed, but at the moment I am not sure just where we would export the water. Nevertheless, I think it is good to put in the bill a provision that places some restriction on exportation.

With regard to the administration of the bill, I favour the viewpoint of the northern affairs minister in the sense that I think he has perhaps a healthier attitude toward water pollution and control than has the Minister of