

Government Orders

to take into consideration impacts on native communities in the area.

That failure to address an absolutely critical social impact in British Columbia could in fact lead to some very serious reactions on the part of those communities. Again, there have been discussions about blockading highways and making very serious stands because of the failure of the government in its environmental review process to consider the social impacts, in this case particularly, on aboriginal communities.

Would the hon. member be in a position to support the proposal that has been put forward in the amendment of the New Democratic Party, to refer this to a committee study? Given matters such as the refusal to consider the Fort Rupert Indian Band concerns, the concerns of the Nimpkish Band, and the Quatsino Indian Band in the social impacts in their particular area, would the hon. member be in a position to support referral of this particular legislation to a study committee?

Certainly, there has been precedent during the term of the government to do so. I recall when the present Speaker of the House was Minister of Fisheries. He, in the middle of a second reading debate, thought it would be very useful to refer an amendment to the Fisheries Act to a study committee. That study committee came back, and the bill proceeded on through the House.

Would the hon. member support it and, indeed, would his party be prepared to support the amendment that we put before the House?

Mr. LeBlanc (Cape Breton—Highlands—Canso): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and I must apologize for not knowing the details of the project in British Columbia to which he is referring.

The point that he has raised about the social aspect of the environmental concerns, particularly on native reserves, is a very good one and clearly points out one more difficulty with this legislation.

He is addressing an aspect of the environmental review process and an element of environmental impacts of large projects, namely their effects on society and on the culture and way of life of our native people. We cannot afford to overlook that, certainly not after the situation that has taken place this summer and with the

ongoing concerns raised by the Cree, for example, in Quebec over the James Bay hydroelectric project.

The problems with Bill C-78, as well as some of the other concerns with the lack of specific regulations to accompany this bill, lead me to suggest that his concern and that of his party about referring the bill to a study committee are well taken and perhaps should be seriously considered.

• (1730)

Mr. Paul Martin (LaSalle—Émard): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member. In this House which all too often operates on a pure adversarial basis, the member has given us a very well balanced presentation. I think it is all the more important to understand his very deep criticisms of the bill given the fact that he really did attempt to address the bill in as objective a way as possible.

One of the underlying theses, of course, of any piece of legislation is that the government possesses the requisite national will to really implement a fully and, in this particular case, a truly revolutionary policy in terms of environmental awareness.

I wonder if he would comment as to whether he thinks this government has that kind of national will.

Mr. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Mr. Speaker, I would like to be able to answer that question. I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

Of course this element of will is one which we, on this side of the House, have been trying to assess from this government ever since the last election. We have seen that the government has a lot of will, but we wonder about the direction in which that will has been placed.

It has demonstrated a great deal of will to ride roughshod over Canadians when it wants to get its tax agenda forward and on economic policy, but on environmental matters we have seen delay and delay. First of all, we have seen a green plan agenda, which is merely questions and no real actions. We have seen a Bill C-78, which is long overdue, but still is weak in many areas.

I guess the real test of a government's will is its actions and its commitment, its concrete actions. So far what we have seen is a fair bit of good rhetoric and polite words to indicate that the government is serious about environmental concerns, but we have not seen really concrete