

Government Organization Act, 1970

Mr. Barnett: Mr. Chairman, as I listened to the former Minister of Fisheries I found myself mentally referring to him as the hon. member for Queens. In that sense I might join him on this occasion by taking a small "c" conservative attitude toward certain things. Let me say a few words in support of the proposed amendment.

I, too, sentimentally reject the suggestion that the word "fisheries" should disappear from the title of a department of the Canadian government. I realize that the hon. member for Malpeque was not being merely sentimental when expressing his regret at the proposed disappearance of this name from a Canadian government department. Like the hon. member, I believe there is a series of valid reasons why there should be a Department of Fisheries in Canada. During the last two or three days I have attended a symposium on mercury pollution, under the auspices of the Royal Society of Canada, at the National Library. Through you, Mr. Chairman, I should like to say as a member of this House how proud I was of the contribution made to that symposium by the officers of the Department of Fisheries. They were a credit to that department, to this House and to Canada generally.

If it was not obvious to me before, I have realized in the last two days the very close relationship between Canadian fisheries resources and the state of the environment. One thing pointed out at that conference on mercury pollution—I should like to underline this as a member of the fisheries committee of this House—was that despite all the concern which has existed in recent months about the mercury content of fish, the officers of the department made it clear that fish products in Canada are relatively uncontaminated. There is no more input of mercury through the consumption of fish products than there is in the general range of food which Canadians consume.

The former minister has underlined my view that there are circumstances under which must be apparent both nationally and internationally that official voices are being raised in respect of the fisheries industry of Canada. When reflecting on the question raised by the amendment now before the House, it seems to me that in the international realm, if not domestically, it is important that it is known around the world that we have a fisheries department in Canada. It should also be known throughout the world that the Canadian government is responsible for the Canadian fishing industry. Canada is a signatory nation to many international fisheries treaties and conventions. I hope Canada will become increasingly involved in international negotiations leading to a more rational management of sea resources. For this reason I feel it is not merely a sentimental attachment that the preceding speaker and I express regret at the disappearance of this department which has been in existence since confederation. Consideration should be given to the retention of the word "fisheries" in the title of this department.

I think there is another reason of importance. We live close to another federal state where constitutional jurisdiction in respect of fisheries is different from ours. In the United States there are departments of fisheries in various states. The primary constitutional jurisdiction

[Mr. MacLean.]

there, in respect of fisheries, rests with state governments. We also know that many provinces in Canada have fisheries departments. Unfortunately, the province from which I come has not in recent years seen fit to maintain a provincial department of fisheries. Nevertheless, it seems to me that if we abolish the title Department of Fisheries there may be a tendency on the part of people outside our borders who are interested in the development and administration of fisheries to direct their attention toward our provincial departments rather than to the federal government.

There are valid international reasons for the retention of the word "fisheries" in the title of the new department. During earlier discussions I suggested we should have two deputy ministers. At that time it was my view that it was quite proper to establish a department of the environment, that this should be a matter of great importance to the government and that it should establish a department concerned with general environmental problems. There is this close and natural relationship between the two departments. I was not quarrelling with the idea that the minister who has been the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry is to be the minister who will head this new department. I think that is generally accepted by all members of the House. I believe, however, this is one of those cases where the government would be well advised to accept the proposal put forward from this side in good faith and with a good deal of seriousness.

• (8:30 p.m.)

I recall that in an earlier discussion on the reorganization of various branches and functions of government a proposal was placed before this House which would have done away with what was a fairly historic name in respect of government departments, namely, Indian Affairs. I remember at that time the hon. member for Skeena and myself, among others, took up the question of doing away with the title Indian Affairs in a department of government. We suggested that the title Indian Affairs should be added to the name of the department. This idea was taken up on the government side, and rather to our surprise the name of the new department when finally adopted was not the Department of Northern Development and Indian Affairs but, rather, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. This, in effect, placed the name that was to have been abolished at the top of the totem pole.

The amendment which has been moved would do nothing more than was done in respect of Indian Affairs. I think it is agreed that that was a worth-while move in view of the developments which have taken place among the Indian people of Canada since that time. I suggest that the question of the fisheries of Canada will be a matter of increasing, rather than decreasing importance and that it would be right and proper that this House recognize that fact by adopting the name proposed in the amendment as the title of this new department.

Mr. McCleave: Mr. Chairman, I do not see the minister rising. If he would indicate his acceptance of the amendment I would quickly sit down. However, I believe arguments could be made for recognition of this historic