

Fisheries Act

The facts are in stark contrast to the imaginary problems which could arise through some possible irresponsible application of some part of the Fisheries Act by some fisheries officers at some time, in some places.

It would be probably a much more comfortable situation if I did not have to speak at third reading and acknowledge the fact that within the Kootenay West there is an equal mix and balance between industry and those whose principal concern is the impact of industry on the environment. However, I am not prepared to duck that particular responsibility. For example, there are companies taking water from the Columbia River and putting it back in: we have Cominco Ltd, Canadian Cellulose Pulp and Paper, Canadian Cellulose Saw Mills; and we have Kootenay Forest Products on Kootenay Lake, and Triangle Pacific on Slocan Lake, which subsequently flows into the Kootenay and thence into the Columbia system.

There is also a variety of mines which are in production from time to time. Their systems require the intake and outflow of water. The H. B. Mine is an example. I should like to draw attention to one situation which occurred with the H. B. Mine. One day they had a fracture in their line leading to their settling pond, and a couple of so-called environmentalists who were driving by noticed this outflow going across the highway. H. B. Mine is only a couple of miles up the mountain side over a good road. What did they do? They did not drive up the mountainside to H. B. Mine and tell them that they had a serious break in their outflow which was causing it to go into the Salmo River and not into their settling pond. Instead they travelled to Nelson and reported it to a fisheries officer who, some hours or days later, was able to take responsible action.

Charges were laid against H. B. Mine. In dealing with that particular case the judge chastised most severely those two so-called environmentalists who would rather penalize industry and catch them with an accidental spill than resolve the matter by going directly to the plant and advising them of the problem.

There is no question that there has to be a balance; there is no question that industry has some very legitimate concerns. If it becomes apparent that the ministry is using an iron fist within the scope of this bill, then they are going to be in trouble. Officials may satisfy a community of 4,000, 20,000 or 100,000 people for a week or two weeks when because of an accidental spill, an industry is shut down. But if their action is not a reasoned action, taken with a proper balance in decision-making, and if they go in with the clout which some official thinks he has, and may well have under this bill, as I say they may find they have satisfied the environmental concerns of the community for the first week. But when the pay cheques are no longer coming in, they may suddenly find that the situation has reversed itself. Of course I am dealing with the so-called imaginary problems to which the minister alluded. In statements made by members at the standing committee level, I think those concerns were addressed to the officials, and the minister has gone on record in assuring us that they will use a reasoned balance.

I do not want the people in my riding, or people anywhere in Canada, to think I am espousing the cause of industry, because

[Mr. Brisco.]

I am not. I am aware of the environmental damage which has been created by some industries. There is no question of that. The evidence is on the record. Certainly there are those who seem simply not to care, probably and possibly as a result of previous amendments to the Fisheries Act and the introduction of environmental legislation. On the other hand there are those industries which have spent millions of dollars on improvement of their efforts to combat pollution. If we are going to force upon an industry the expenditure of millions of dollars to improve an effluent discharge by a decimal percentage point, then I ask where is the reasoned balance? I am sure those in my riding who share my environmental concern will accept that point and that argument.

There is one other area which gives me cause for concern, and I should like to refer to the minister's speech at page 8, which reads as follows:

For example, there is an over-all blanket requirement for the provision of fishways at all obstructions if this is demanded by the minister. Owners or proposers in fact cannot even start construction until the minister has approved the form and capacity, and location of fish passage structures at dams. I do not always exercise this authority; in fact, I weigh the relative value; the value of a dam for whatever purposes proposed and the value of the fisheries resources.

I wish we could have had statements of that sort from the minister during the period in which we were dealing with the Columbia River treaty. I wonder if the minister is going to have the intestinal fortitude to live up to his word, when it comes to the Revelstoke Dam. Regardless of the Columbia River treaty, will the minister have the guts to live up to his word when it comes to the diversion of the Kootenay River into the Columbia River? As a result of the Columbia River treaty, already we are finding that the nutrients in the Kootenay Lake have changed, that water temperatures have changed, and that fisheries have dropped dramatically. Under that treaty we saw the total destruction of the spawning beds, all except one, that for the famous Kootenay Lake trout, a special individual species running up to 30 pounds and 40 pounds. We have seen the destruction of the spawning beds of the Kokanee, a landlocked salmon, sometimes called redfish. It is true they have put in false spawning beds which seem to have helped the Kokanee to recover. The facts are that fisheries have degenerated and deteriorated.

● (2200)

If the minister is not prepared to use his clout nothing will happen. There will be no freshwater fishery on the Columbia system or on the Kootenay. I want the minister to know that the people of Kootenay West and the people of British Columbia will be watching very closely to see what he and his department do about this type of construction which in some cases, I believe, could be classified as destruction.

I wonder whether this minister would have insisted upon fish ladders at the Keenleyside Dam—that dam constructed under the Columbia Treaty which we discover now was not needed. Regarding the minister's statement at committee on hydro projects or dams of any nature, I want him to know that I, and probably a lot of other members, will be watching very closely to see what he and his department are doing.