

Freshwater Fisheries

We seem to spend an awful lot of time looking to the north for our energy resources, but we are not spending very much time considering the natural resources we have. In my opinion many of these natural resources are more important at the present time than much of the exploration work which is going on in the Arctic islands. I ask that every consideration be given to the immediate appointment of a separate committee to deal with this very complex problem and to help the fishermen solve this problem.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Cyr (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to have the opportunity to speak on the motion of the hon. member for Churchill (Mr. Smith) requesting the appointment of another Standing Committee on Fisheries to which all matters concerning freshwater and inland fisheries in Canada will be referred.

The sponsor of this bill is a very active member of our Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forests. I do not wish to question the sincerity and the good intentions of the hon. member in presenting his motion, and without being an expert on the matter of fisheries, I believe that we are all sincerely working towards the improvement of the fishermen's lot and also to assist as much as possible fish processing plants, whether they are in the East, the West or even in the centre of Canada.

While I find many of the hon. member's arguments valid, I still cannot support this motion, since I believe that another standing committee of this House will not improve the freshwater and inland fisheries of Canada.

If my hon. friend is aware of the complexity of establishing committees in this House and the constant difficulty in having a quorum, he will realize it would be very difficult to find members to sit on that other committee.

● (1620)

As recorded in *Hansard* for March 31, 1976, this House has 20 standing and special committees, and six joint Senate and Commons committees. Most of these committees include 20 members. There are 30 members on each of the External Affairs, National Defence and Agriculture committees. Joint committees such as that of the Library of Parliament include 16 senators and 22 members of this House, 38 in all.

The hon. member for Churchill, quite coincidentally, sits on the same committees I am on, that is Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and also Fisheries and Forestry, where we also deal with environment. The hon. member is also on the Committee of National Resources and Public Works. It will be realized that when a member sits on three committees meeting at least twice a week, this means he has to attend at least eight to ten committee meetings each week.

Mr. Speaker, apparently the official opposition have some difficulty in making suggestions in this House. Apparently, that party lacks leadership and cannot agree on a particular matter. No doubt the hon. member for Churchill already discussed the proposals for a new committee on Freshwater and Inland Fisheries. He will have discussed it in caucus. But I doubt whether the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) agrees with him to

[Mr. Smith (Churchill).]

establish another standing committee of this House, because on October 28, 1975, if I remember correctly, the hon. member for Peace River, in a statement dealing with the Standing Orders, had this to say, and I quote:

... the government should introduce some flexibility in the control they are exercising on committee programs and chairing. Certain documents and reports tabled in this House should be automatically referred to committee, and certain committee reports such as that on public accounts for instance, should be debated in this House. Committees should be empowered to make inquiries when members feel they are needed. Committees should be reduced to a more limited size. Chairmen should be appointed in a more objective way, probably by a neutral source, and provision should be made for appealing the chairmen's decisions.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to repeat these remarks by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin): "... committees should be reduced to a more limited size..." This necessarily entails reducing the number of standing committees of this House, now totalling 30.

Mr. Speaker, why increase the number of committees when there are already too many. I believe that hon. members, as the member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), would agree to reduce this number and have between 15 and 20 committees. Most members now sit on three or even four committees and it is difficult, indeed impossible, for a party like the New Democratic Party or the Social Credit Party to send a representative to each one of these committees.

That is why members of these parties, which have only 10 to 15 representatives in the House, are forced to run from one committee to another every day. For instance, in the fisheries and forestry committee on March 30, and the hon. member for Churchill could corroborate my statement, the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Leggatt) arrived in the committee room at about 9:45 p.m. and as the Committee was to adjourn at ten o'clock he could not put his question. He was told that at the next sitting of the committee he would be the first to question witnesses. So the hon. member came to the committee and was recognized first to ask his question. It took from 15 to 20 minutes, then he had to leave for another committee of which he was also a member. Mr. Speaker, how is it possible for members who have to attend the debates of 4, 5 or 6 committees the same day to be really efficient and perform their tasks conscientiously? I say this is not possible.

Mr. Speaker, the committees or the House are always faced with the same problem; the governing party has to keep the quorum, so when the provisions of a bill are about to be adopted or when budgetary estimates are to be voted, the party whip as to run from one committee room to another and try to get the quorum. I wish we would have discussed a motion proposing to reduce the number of the standing committees of the House, and not to increase them.

In his motion, my good friend the hon. member for Churchill (Mr. Smith) requests that the new committee be responsible exclusively for the questions concerning freshwater and inland fisheries in Canada. This proposal might cause much discussion and bring about a constitutional debate with the provinces.

I shall ask a question to the hon. member, if he wants to answer it later: has he consulted his province concerning