

Water Resources

We are no longer willing to sacrifice the health and beauty of our surroundings on the altar of economic growth or so-called standard of living which serves self but takes little care of the environment and replacing things for those who come after. Here in Canada we have continued for so long to search for that elusive Canadian identity. May I have the temerity to suggest that no identifying characteristic of Canadians would be more worthy than our observable commitment to a recognizable Canadian ethic which proclaimed that henceforth we will include the quality of our environment in our calculus of progress. This, Mr. Speaker, is the essential spirit of the Canada Water Act.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Aiken: Mr. Speaker, before I begin my remarks may I ask the minister a question. I hesitate to ask him such a crass question at this time. I wonder whether he could enlighten the House concerning the sum of money the government has in mind as the federal cost of this program in its first year of operation.

Mr. Greene: The Act quite clearly provides a framework. The very gist of it is that polluters will pay for the cleaning of the water. As they dirty it, they clean it up again or pay for the cost of cleaning it up. As I said earlier we do not have all the answers. It may be that public bodies—and I am thinking in particular of municipalities—may require financial help by way of long-term loans or otherwise. I think it should be borne very clearly in mind, however, that the whole basis of the bill is that polluters must pay for the cleaning of the water and the cost they would pay is the cost of production which would be in the future.

Mr. G. H. Aiken (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly agree with everything the minister has said concerning the common objective of everyone in this House to maintain the best environment in which Canadians can live. The minister has given us an idea of what he sees in the Canada Water Act and an idea of what he thinks may develop as a result of this legislation. Certainly, no one in this House and no one in Canada will question the objective and the need of keeping our environment clean and our waters from becoming polluted. But whether or not this objective is being achieved in the bill before us is what we are here to discuss and what the committee, to

which I assume this bill will be sent, has to determine.

• (4:40 p.m.)

In my view, the bill which we are discussing, the future Canada Water Act, does not fulfill the objectives that the minister has set for it. I believe that the Canada Water Act is a complicated, devious, vague and ineffective piece of legislation. It is complicated because it proposes to set up local water boards which will derive some authority from the federal government, some authority from the provincial governments, but no real authority from anyone. It does nothing to unwind or cut through the maze of jurisdictional division, but in fact compounds the present jurisdictional uncertainty by adding to it.

The bill is devious because it pretends to provide a federal initiative and support for pollution control in the water field, but in fact its provisions are so worded that the federal government gives no leadership and provides no effective financing. The bill is vague because the water quality management agencies which it purports to establish are given no authority or guidance. The powers to raise money are not defined, and these agencies will be left to work out for themselves solutions to problems which the federal government itself should settle for them.

The bill is ineffective because it is based in large part upon federal-provincial agreements, and lacking such agreement in any province the whole bill will falter and fail. No effective consultations with the provinces in order to ensure the success of the bill were undertaken prior to announcement of the government's intention, and the success of the bill is now a matter of pure chance. Support of this bill will be forthcoming from the Official Opposition solely because the government has apparently decided that this is the only basis on which they will proceed, and we must have some action, however feeble, in the hope that the committee hearings will convince the government to make major revisions and to take more positive action in the area of pollution control. Having made this initial description of the bill, I now turn to some more general comments.

The problems of our environment and its pollution are generally considered to be one of the major concerns of Canada and in fact of North America in the seventies. In the past we have had other major problems. In the fifties we were concerned with highways and transportation; in the sixties it is and has