

Canadian Environmental Protection Act

The main reason there has been slow and inadequate action in Canada is that this Government, like previous Governments, believes that the so-called market forces, free enterprise principles, and business practices should take priority. As long as there is a buck to be made, the control of dangerous and hazardous products will take second place.

For example, this legislation exempts pesticides used on farms. As my hon. friend, the Hon. Member for Prince Albert (Mr. Hovdebo) pointed out yesterday, 86 per cent of non-occupational exposure to pesticides and herbicides comes from our food, 11 per cent from our water, and 3 per cent from air. Obviously it has been apparent for many years that the vulnerability of every citizen to the bad effects of these substances is still very high.

I do not know why this legislation would exclude substances that are regulated by other Acts of Parliament because it should encompass all of them. Emissions from motor vehicles are excluded from this legislation because they are the jurisdiction of the Department of Transport. Pesticides and herbicides are excluded from this legislation because they come under the Pest Control Products Act.

We have a multiplicity of legislation scattered through several Departments, and one does not know what the other is doing. There is conflict among the Departments, the public, and the interests of those who manufacture, distribute, and sell dangerous and hazardous products. It will require some real political courage and determination by any Government to gather all of these laws under one jurisdiction. We can have the best law in the world and the best regulations, but they are only as good as the paper they are written on if they are not enforced. Without adequate inspection and enforcement, the law is meaningless. Inspection and enforcement both at the federal and provincial levels have been woefully inadequate all these years.

● (1120)

While the Bill is fine in principle, it leaves out a lot. I hope the Government is persuaded to move substantial amendments and accept some significant amendments from Members on all sides of the House in order to make this legislation a world leader.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The time for questions and comments has now terminated. Debate.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, I must say with all sincerity how delighted I am to participate in the debate today on the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. In just 25 days Canada will begin to celebrate Environment Week, which is set aside to encourage people to reflect on the importance of environmental issues. That will be relatively easy to do, because recent public opinion surveys reveal that 70 per cent of Canadians describe themselves as being more concerned about their environment than ever before.

If there is an issue that brings people out from the comforts of their homes to a public gathering, it is the area of environmental concerns. In my own constituency, when there is a problem of pollution of the Shuswap Lake system, we can be guaranteed that hundreds, if not thousands, of people will show up to hear the issues presented by the various experts. Right now one major issue is whether or not the central part of British Columbia should become a waste disposal area for western North America. I must say that is something that concerns me a great deal. I cannot be very enthusiastic about having our community becoming famous for its waste disposal facilities.

These are the issues we are facing today. We have increased pollution of our soils, our atmosphere, and our river and riverine systems. As a result of various levels of government bringing these problems to the attention of Canadians, we are becoming more and more concerned. I remember the publication that discussed acid rain a few years ago, in the early 1980s. The Government thought it was appropriate that people understand this issue. Most of us had never heard of acid rain. Now it is a household word, I suspect. Young people in particular have a real understanding and appreciation of this problem, which I think bodes well for our future. We have seen this concern develop in the United States over the years, as we have educated Americans to the realities of the acid rain phenomenon.

As we in the House of Commons speak on this subject today, we are all aware that between the rocks of our walls the mortar is falling out and that the stone itself is deteriorating as a result of the acid rain we find around us. When you and I, Mr. Speaker, attempt to go fly-fishing on some of the beautiful lakes surrounding Parliament Hill, we find that although the lakes look clear and we can see right down to the bottom, we cannot see anything in them. There are no bugs, no worms, no fish; there is no life. The lakes have been turned into a lifeless hole. These are the concerns about which we are aware, and today we have an opportunity to discuss the Government's effort at bringing in the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

I want to say right off the top that we plan to support this initiative, although we feel it is a minute step in the right direction. I really must emphasize that I find it difficult to become enthusiastic about this initiative. I find it impossible to be laudatory in my remarks, but I want to say that at least we have an Environmental Protection Act. At least we have taken that initiative as a Parliament, and I am pleased about it. However, while we certainly recognize that this is a movement in the right direction, we still have a long way to go.

I had the opportunity the other day to read the report of a fellow named Ross Hume Hall, who is a member of the Canadian Environmental Advisory Council, a body which advised the federal Minister of the Environment between the years 1975 and 1982. He is presently a professor of biochemistry at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. He presented us with an incredibly valuable insight into just how