

Supply

I hope that this is a temporary passing phase for the Minister, that perhaps the lessons of his own home island will come home to him and he will break out of the mold and try to go back to some of those hopes he kindled with a great many groups when he was first appointed. I fear that will not take place and the country will have to look for others to give some policy direction on the environmental quandary we face.

There is a direction we have tried to set out based on a philosophy of zero discharge, stressing independent monitoring of industrial companies rather than leaving them the right to police their own pollution, stressing the need for much stiffer penalties when pollution does emerge from industry and stressing tough action with our own dump sites. We would speak with much more authority on dump sites in the Niagara Escarpment if we had acted with equal dispatch in excavating dump sites in Lambton County which are dangerous to the people who live down river from that area.

If the Government is looking for direction, another direction is to give more help to municipalities so they can start to handle the sewer problems which are quite serious in the case of Windsor, for example. Finally, we should be much firmer when we negotiate with the United States. We should never see ourselves in the situation where a federal Minister attacks a provincial Minister in order to get an agreement with the United States. Instead, we should look for firmness. We should look for commitment to this country. If we do that, I think we can solve this problem.

● (1550)

Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, there is one particular point I am going to make in response to the speech just made by the Hon. Member for Essex—Windsor (Mr. Langdon). While I in no way want to take away from the importance of and need for action on the difficulties which we face with the toxic chemical situation in the Niagara River, I do want to correct one point. That point is with regard to the relative level of the problem in other areas in North America.

Categorically this does not really represent the worst problem, even in North America. In fact, evidence will be presented next week at the World Large Lakes Conference on Mackinac Island which will show that we suffer no more from the pervasive influence of toxic chemicals than anywhere else on this chemical globe. In many instances we find that we are better off than other parts of the world, both developed and developing countries. This is not to suggest that this is not an important problem in many areas. However, in terms of perspective, I just want to correct that one point made in the Hon. Member's comments.

Mr. Langdon: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. That was the conclusion of the report of the Royal Society of Canada, not something which I brought independently into the debate.

Mr. Gurbin: Mr. Speaker, I was not suggesting that the Hon. Member brought it in independently. I just thought that the information should be available.

The essence of the motion moved by the Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) is timely, but it is redundant. This motion is predicated on either an incomplete assessment and understanding of the situation and circumstances which exist today, or a desire to, in some way, take away from the work that has been done, the achievements that have been recorded, and the leadership that has been shown by the Government of Canada through the Minister of the Environment (Mr. McMillan) in co-operation with other jurisdictions, including Ontario and the United States of America.

I would like to focus my remarks on several somewhat difficult and technical areas. One premise of this motion has very much to do with the relationship and obligation, if you like, which exists through international arrangements beginning with the Boundary Waters Agreement of 1909 through to the 1972 and 1978 Great Lakes Water Agreements. In some ways this is a dry discussion, but it is important that the Member for Davenport understand this so that in the future, instead of bringing forward a motion such as this, he will be able to work from the proper information base and the proper understanding of what those international agreements and understandings represent and mean and what we and the United States have done in terms of complying with them.

I will leave the Boundary Waters Agreement of 1909 and go straight to the 1972 agreement. This agreement initiated a process which has continued to evolve. The 1972 agreement established a foundation on which to build by defining a set of principles to guide the preservation and enhancement of the Great Lakes. The most important of these principles were, first, the setting of water quality objective in the lakes, second, the establishment by the parties of a commitment to undertake all reasonable and practical control programs and, third, the institution of a surveillance and monitoring program which would assess the effectiveness of the control programs and the emergence of any new problems. When a revised agreement was signed in 1978 it preserved the basic principles while, at the same time, broadening the scope of the agreement and introducing the Great Lakes eco system concept.

What has really happened is that we have not only not made concessions but have met the obligations of those agreements. As that agreement is worked out and enacted between the federal Governments in the two respective countries, it becomes subject to the overview, suggestions and control of the IJC. The IJC is a body, the very presence and existence of which depends on the agreement of the two respective Governments to commit themselves to its determinations and findings. Rather than having a magic wand which we can wave to ensure that we or they will do this or that, we have an agreed upon process which is very dependent upon the co-operation of both Governments and upon the reasonable agreed upon action of the International Joint Commission for its effectiveness.