

I deplore some of the publicity about the so-called operation "baby lift". We have not been a party to it, other than to respond to questions of the press, many of them legitimate and some perhaps sensation seeking. We have tried to make it absolutely clear that this is the approach we have been taking.

I might say that I was talking to Mrs. Bronstein last night, and I should like to praise her publicly for her extraordinary heroism and compassion in the efforts she and some of her immediate associates in Viet Nam and Cambodia have made during these terrible weeks, during the tragic crash of the aircraft the other day, and in flying with these 62 children from Saigon to Hong Kong, looking after them overnight and flying with them to Vancouver, and then on the same day travelling with them from Vancouver to Montreal, seeing these children right into the arms of the families who received them for adoptions. I do not think it is a gratuitous comment when I say what an admirable thing she has done. She as well totally agrees with us in deploring some of the publicity about the situation, or the recent fashionable approach being taken to this situation.

I think the proper approach lies somewhere in the middle. Thousands of fine Canadians have come forward in an emotional response, and I would not question their motives for wanting to help and wanting to adopt Vietnamese children. The fact is that very few of those people, as fine an effort as this offer is, are going to have a Vietnamese child to adopt. I do not think there are more than 100 or 150 youngsters left in Viet Nam for whom the adoptive process was in progress, or that we can locate to take out. We are trying our best and in fact there is a flight en route to Saigon now, but I do not know what the manifest of that flight will be when it comes back.

I assure the hon. member we are not doing this in the way that some of the publicity is implying, and to the best of my ability I am trying to make absolutely clear in each statement I have made, or is being made by other representatives of the government, that this is in fact the case.

We have said in respect of any adults who get out of Viet Nam to another country and apply under the refugee program of the Canadian immigration procedures and laws, that they can expect to be treated as such. Again, we cannot charge into Viet Nam with a mass refugee program because one does not exist in that sense.

We have been in consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, indicating to him that we will join in any international effort to alleviate the human misery we are seeing unfold in Viet Nam. That, of course, would include consideration of an acceptance of that kind of movement to the degree past patterns have indicated we are prepared to do it. So, it would be under the advice of the United Nations High Commissioner, but in our communications with him and his office they have not yet come to the conclusion that that is the appropriate action to take. I think the reasons are fairly obvious in a situation which is a day-by-day unfolding of change in Indo-China. I think the hon. member and I are in agreement as to the proper approach in this area, and I believe the only conflict perhaps is a misinterpretation of what is said, by the press.

Adjournment Debate

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS—ALBERTA DECISION TO ALLOW INCREASED EMISSIONS OF SULPHUR DIOXIDE FROM SYNCRUDE PLANT

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, on March 11 I raised a question with the Minister of the Environment (Mrs. Sauvé) on why the minister was supporting the decision of the Alberta Department of the Environment to allow Syncrude to double its sulphur dioxide emission from 140 long tons to 287 long tons a day. The Syncrude operation in the Athabasca oil sands has a potential for massive environmental damage in terms of air, land and water pollution over some 800 square miles.

On the issue of environment I should like to quote from a letter the federal Minister of the Environment wrote to her counterpart in the Alberta government. The federal minister stated:

It does appear however, from an examination of the available information, that Syncrude has failed to appreciate the real scope of environmental concerns and has also failed to address the question of environmental protection in either a realistic or an adequate manner.

Then further in the letter we find this:

To reiterate, Syncrude's documentation is deficient in detailed information in many areas of environmental concern and we believe that there is a likelihood for major environmental damage.

I would have thought the minister, having written that letter, would be following the environmental development in the oil sands very closely. On the issue of sulphur dioxide emissions we now know and have learned from a federal study, from which I shall quote later, that sulphur dioxide combined with water vapour and mists common to oil sands can produce a killer fog similar to the great London fog of 1952 which killed 3,500 people. Air inversions which trap pollutants close to the ground occur on 90 per cent of winter days in the Syncrude lease area. SO₂ could also combine with surface waters to produce an acid which kills vegetation in a drainage system which reaches as far away as Saskatchewan. In January, 1973, the Alberta Department of the Environment instructed Syncrude to limit maximum release of SO₂ to 140 long tons a day.

Pressure by the oil companies caused the Alberta government to back down in July, 1973, and the maximum rate was increased not to exceed 287 long tons a day. The Federal Department of the Environment task force report of August 19, 1974, on Syncrude environmental issue states:

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Through the application of best practicable technology, total SO₂ emissions could be reduced from 287 long tons a day to an estimated 40 long tons a day.

The report disputes Syncrude's claim regarding environmental damage being negligible and it says that the Syncrude study was done under ideal conditions. It states:

Under normal plant operating conditions, it appears that the ground level concentrations of SO₂ will exceed the provincial standard and the federal objective several fold during more restrictive meteorological conditions.

In the light of major environmental damage from SO₂ emissions at Syncrude, as admitted by the minister's own department, and in view of the fact that there exists technology to reduce emissions from 287 to 40 long tons a day, what action does the federal government, a partner in