

First, the Minister distanced himself from his own scientists on the whole danger posed by toxic chemicals. Then a few weeks later in November, in order to regain ground, he described the situation of the St. Clair River as awesome and even chastised one of his backbenchers, the Member from Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. Jones), for not taking the matter seriously. Finally, with no reference to our obligation to the U.S. under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, he drops this hot potato in the lap of the Ontario Government and invokes, as the remedy, the yet to be conceived Environmental Contaminants Act.

● (1150)

The Minister of the Environment reminds me of Bugs Bunny hopping from one issue to another and making promises which he hopes will be forgotten. He is good at describing problems. He is hopeless in implementing solutions. He is good at public relations, and slippery on substance.

I must refer back to the authors of this report on the Great Lakes who say, at page 117, I believe: "Political capabilities for correcting mistakes are inadequate". How accurate. This description, it seems to me, applies to the present Government which, with cuts in research, cuts in the establishment of centres of excellence on toxicity such as the Guelph centre, cuts in the Canadian Wildlife Service, with inaction on the Niagara River, with ineptness in appointments to fill vacancies on the International Joint Commission, and in passing the buck on the St. Clair River, is sending out a message, as it has in other cases in which it faced difficult issues, which reads: "If it is complex, if it requires forward-looking thinking, we cannot". When the going gets tough, Mr. Speaker, the Government gives up.

We must conclude that the Government basically has no confidence in itself. The Government seems to have no agenda, and not only on toxic chemicals. When it promises legislation on toxic chemicals it promises an initiative which it found already in the works when it took office. The Environmental Contaminants Act will not clean up the St. Clair River. It will not clean up the Niagara River. The Government is dreaming in colour if it thinks that that can be achieved by invoking an Act yet to be passed.

The existing toxic chemicals in the river bed, Mr. Speaker, come from sewer outfalls, leaching from dump sites, and other existing and on-going sources of pollution which cannot be dealt with through the legislation which the Government intends to introduce because we are talking of the present and of the past. In addition, the St. Clair is an international river. The Government has an obligation under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement to clean up the situation. The Government has several instruments at its disposal. One, it could reinstate the two-year accelerated write-offs under the Income Tax Act. This is an important incentive to industry to get modern treatment equipment in place, separate sewers, modernize monitoring systems, and to ensure that the highest standards of waste treatment are applied. Two, it could offer a special program to municipalities such as Sarnia to provide financial assistance for the installation of equipment and

facilities for the best possible treatment of residential, commercial, and industrial waste waters that pass through the municipal sewer system. It could create a super fund with interested provincial Governments to remove toxic waste from dumps and, therefore, remove the source of future problems at leaking dumps.

To restore the confidence of the people who live alongside the St. Clair River, the Minister must come up with a plan of action. He must move swiftly. He must protect the St. Clair River because it has a bearing on the clean-up of the mess along the Niagara River where we expect the Americans to do something for us. To rely on the Environmental Contaminants Act to clean up the present situation, as the Minister said on several occasions last week that he would, is not realistic.

Action to clean up past and present contamination will cost money. The Government will be tempted to use the deficit as an excuse for not acting. Mr. Speaker, if there is money to bail out the banks, how can there be no money to protect the health of this and future generations of Canadians? If there is money for national defence why not defend our health, the quality of our water, the economy of our future, and the well-being of future Canadians?

It is also important to put on record some observations as to where these toxic chemicals come from. They come from buried industrial waste, from daily operations in industry, from the use of chemicals in agriculture, from municipal waste, from chemical production, and from the waste of businesses such as dry cleaners, photographic establishments, and garages. In other words, they come from the daily activities in our cities and on our farms. In Ontario alone, about half a million tons of hazardous industrial wastes are disposed of improperly each year.

Where do these toxic chemicals go? They go into the soil and gradually, over time, into the ground water. They go into our creeks, rivers, and lakes, directly or indirectly. By way of evaporation of water containing toxic substances they go into the air, into the cloud system, and eventually, through rain, they precipitate and come back onto crops and the soil and, eventually, into our food. Over time, Mr. Speaker, these toxic substances become an integral part of the human body.

Therefore, the question that follows is whether we can do something and whether we are still in time.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. Could I ask the Hon. Member to conclude his speech?

**Mr. Caccia:** Mr. Speaker, I will seek your permission to accelerate. The answer to that question, Mr. Speaker, could be a positive one if we see the problem not only as an environmental one, but as a threat to our economy and our health. You will ask, why the economy? Contaminated water eventually means cost of filtration and cost of treatment of water. Contaminated food eventually means costs in health care and the economic cost, if not borne by this generation, could be immense for the next.

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