

Dumping at Sea

whether we would not find a situation where it would be cheaper to commit the offence and pay the fine than to dispose of the material to be dumped through some other system. In this regard a likely offender could be a government department.

The bill provides for the application of a permit before action. Here again one wonders how difficult it would be to obtain a permit, particularly if one of the government's own creations were involved, one of its semi-autonomous organizations that could very well have a real problem of disposal. We also know there are various projects under way involving use of atomic power. There are waste products here that could be very damaging, and which in some instances have been dumped at sea by certain countries. Possibilities of land disposal along the British Columbia coast are somewhat limited by the terrain.

I think there would be a real suspicion in the minds of many people who read this bill that, in one sense, the bill is not so much against dumping but rather is a bill that legitimizes the whole business. It makes dumping permissive. It speaks in terms of the issuance of a permit to dump if it can be established that there is a risk to health or something like that.

There are also escape clauses to prevent loss of life. The west coast of British Columbia is notoriously stormy. If anyone were going to do some dumping, obviously the time to do it would be during the winter season when storms were more severe. It would be a relatively simple matter to file a report stating that the seas were high and the risk to life was great, and that the cargo that was to be disposed of on land had to be dumped overboard. There are extensive possibilities along this line. Then there is the policing aspect. Here again our patrolling is notoriously weak and we have an inadequate coastguard.

● (2050)

In British Columbia through the recent winter we knew how restricted we were in terms of finding lost cars that contained highly volatile substances. These cars were lost off a barge and were not located for some length of time. The whole search machinery on the Pacific coast is not too accurate. One suspects an offence could be committed and the offending ship could return to port without being found at all unless there is considerable contribution by the Department of National Defence, which department, the bill assures us, would be involved. However, knowing the restricted budget in that area and the utter lack of capability by that department to fly over the Arctic any longer, much in the bill about the Arctic Ocean surely is nothing but brave words and a pious hope that in passing this bill we will have accomplished something.

We should realize also that a good deal of the preamble to the remarks of the parliamentary secretary dealt with the fact that this is a convention of the United Nations and that 90 or 92 nations gathered together to debate it. We also know that the powers of this international organization are fading literally by the day and that its powers to intervene in disputes verging on war are very slim indeed. One suspects that the power of the United Nations to intervene for the purpose of preventing a nation which is determined to choose the cheaper way of disposing of its waste would be very slender indeed. The principle of the

[Mr. Johnston.]

bill is one which I think we can welcome, but its application, both to this country and internationally, is something about which I think we could well maintain an extremely healthy skepticism.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): Order, please. Before recognizing the Minister of the Environment (Mrs. Sauvé) I should remind the House that if the minister speaks now this will close the debate at this stage of the bill.

[Translation]

Hon. Jeanne Sauvé (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with great interest to all the interventions concerning Bill C-37, an Act to provide for the control of dumping of wastes and other substances in the ocean.

Mr. Speaker, I would like simply to give the reasons for the introduction of this bill. As we all know, the seas are only a single body of water, and coastal countries should not make improper use of the sea in general, or even of their own coastal waters. As the sea goes, so goes mankind, as the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Wenman) said in quoting one of my recent speeches at the Law of the Sea Conference.

The sea used to be considered a purifier with unlimited capacities, but today, with a better knowledge of the oceans and the capacity to measure the quality of its waters, we have to question whether the sea will be able to keep forever its purity and its quality. A number of member countries of the United Nations, concerned about sea pollution, tried to develop what has been called the Oslo Convention, which suggests that coastal countries unite to protect the sea.

Wishing as ever to protect the environment, Canada, which, in passing, became one of the fore-runners in this field by creating its Department of Environment and introducing its environment policy, wanted to be among the first 15 countries to sign this convention. But for this, we must pass an act to make our standards and regulations compatible with those of other countries.

This is the basic reason for this bill. We already have in Canada several acts which allow us to protect oceans against pollution, but this legislation had to be added to these acts, to make them compatible with those of the other countries who will sign the convention.

I am very pleased with the co-operation of the House in referring this bill to committee where we can, at leisure, study it in detail. I shall limit myself to answering some of the questions, perhaps the most urgent, brought up by hon. members, notably their concern about the possibility of radioactive substances being disposed of in the oceans. Must I remind then, Madam Speaker, that a Canadian policy forbids categorically the dumping of radioactive substances into the ocean? Disposal of those substances is governed by the Atomic Energy of Canada, Limited, according to extremely severe regulations that are constantly up-dated.

Another hon. member spoke of inspectors or analysts, whom I could appoint and whose appointments could give jobs to all the Liberal candidates who were not elected.

I think, Madam Speaker, we shall have to be more concerned with Progressive Conservative members, for