

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 22, 1985

The House met at 11 a.m.

● (1105)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY, S.O. 62—PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the Government has displayed negligence with regard to the protection, maintenance and improvement of the environment as manifested in its ill-advised reduction in services, its complacent attitude toward controlling potential hazards and its complete abdication of any leadership in the protection of the environmental health and safety of Canadians.

He said: Mr. Speaker, you may ask why we have moved this motion today. Our answer to you, of course, is that there is a mounting dissatisfaction on the part of Canadians. What the Tory Government has boasted about achieving during the past six months, Mr. Speaker, was only possible because of the work done by successive Liberal Governments until September, 1984. In other words, the food was ready to be served. What was ready to be put on the table was the agreement with the provinces on acid rain; the provision of funds for the clean-up by way of modernization of the non-ferrous smelter industries, the car pollution controls; the laws and regulations on the transportation of toxic chemicals and the water inquiry. The groundwork was done. The foundation and momentum were provided by successive Liberal Governments. The Tories may not like to hear that but it is a fact.

What must be addressed today is what the Progressive Conservative Government has neglected to do with respect to the environment. That is what we call in our motion "abdication of leadership". It is abdication of leadership, for instance, when the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in Quebec City fails to impress on President Reagan Canada's 50 per cent reduction program on acid rain; the Prime Minister allows himself to be sidetracked by President Reagan with the appointment of William Davis as the acid rain envoy. It is abdication of leadership when the Government of Canada abandons our international role on acid rain instead of intensifying it this spring in the months leading to the Helsinki agreement which is to be signed by the ECE nations of which Canada is a member, having launched the Ottawa Club in March, 1984. At that time there were ten nations taking part. They have now become 20. It would be extremely important to ensure by international and diplomatic initiatives that we get the United

Kingdom to sign, or to declare itself ready to sign. That would make quite an impact in Washington. It is extremely important also to get Greece, Turkey, Spain and Portugal to join because this is the way in which, hopefully, we can get the United States administration to sign up in Helsinki in July of this year.

With respect to PCBs, Mr. Speaker, the Government failed to recognize immediately the federal role and responsibility both on the question of interprovincial trucking and on the question of controlling air transport of contaminated samples until it was pushed by the Opposition. I must say, Mr. Speaker, it took long and hard work to arrive at the Transportation of Hazardous Goods Act because of its complexity, the regulations and the consultations which were needed with industry.

Now that it is all in place, I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the key word on this is "toughness"; toughness with regulations, penalties and with preventive measures. I say this because we must remember as a basic principle that the health of Canadians is the most important asset we have and we must protect it. The solution to the management of PCBs and, for that matter, other toxic substances is not through transportation arrangements across Canada but through a safe disposal policy, short transportation distances, safe methods of elimination, a well informed public, and provinces which have and must have the political guts fully to discharge their responsibilities, particularly in Ontario and Quebec.

● (1110)

While we are on the subject of transportation, I might ask what leadership is the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs (Mr. Crombie) giving with respect to his responsibility to protect the ecologically fragile north from proposed tanker routes across Lancaster Sound? His silence on this issue as well as on the recommendations contained in the task force on northern conservation published in December of 1984 has been deafening.

Another Minister who seems to be silent on a crucial matter of interest to Canadians, that of pesticides, is the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise). Despite reassurances, he still has yet to move, despite all the work done in 1983 and 1984, on permitting public participation in the registration of pesticides and in arranging for a pesticides management advisory board. What we see instead is what I would call negative leadership. Let me explain.

Negative leadership is the ignoring of the plea by thousands and thousands of Canadians who still oppose the wildlife cuts, the amount being saved by that cut representing an infinitesimal fraction of 1 per cent of the deficit, while the social and