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era. These people decided, in many cases for reasons of increased profitability and productivity, as it was understood then, to use synthetic substances as opposed to more traditional and renewable substances such as cotton, wood or rubber. These were decisions that were not made in the market-place. I grant the Government, which believes that all things are decided in the market-place, the theory that people could have chosen not to buy those products. However, it was often the case that they either bought something which was made of these synthetic substances or they did not buy anything at all because the former product was no longer manufactured.

As the Hon. Member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. McCurdy) was trying to say, in many cases we are not just talking about choosing blindly, we are talking about informed choice. The fact of the matter is that it is only now that we are coming to be informed about many of the substances which were chosen, not by consumers but by the people making those products. That is not to say that there have not been people warning us all along since that time. I can remember even 10 years ago hearing concerns expressed about some of the things that are taken for granted today and at that time the people who expressed such concerns were regarded as some kind of doom and gloomers. They were considered to be party-poopers and against progress and the 20th century. We now hear things coming out of the mouths of otherwise very conservative people which sound much like the things they were probably derisive of some 10 or 15 years ago.

In this respect I wish to address what I think is the main problem for the Government as it concerns the environment. I do not intend to address in great detail the actual text of the motion, which is to condemn the Government for its handling of the problem of toxic chemicals. I do not think the previous Government did a bang-up job either. I think the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia), whose good intentions with respect to the environment I do not question, is often too preoccupied with trying to defend the record of the previous Government, instead of putting it behind him and trying to do the best in the present context.

It seems to me that a Conservative Government has at least two problems when it comes to the environment. One of course is with respect to transboundary environmental problems. We know that the two most contentious issues in this respect are acid rain and pollution of the Great Lakes, particularly as a result of pollution from the American side getting into the Niagara River. It seems to me that the problem from a foreign policy point of view, as far as transboundary pollution is concerned, is that members of the Conservative Party are convinced that they can get what we as Canadians want collectively from America, in terms of action on how it is polluting our environment, by the soft-sell approach, by being nice to the Americans and by adopting the approach of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney). I do not say that we should be nasty to them; but there is a difference between the buddy-buddy approach and the firm, friendly approach which I think needs to be taken with our American neighbours.

In this respect, for instance, we saw very different responses to the report of the presidential and prime-ministerial envoys on acid rain. Members on the Conservative side felt constrained to say something nice about a report which was obviously a bust. Mr. Lewis obviously obtained the upper hand over Mr. Davis in recommending something which fit quite nicely into the needs of American politics and into the scenario desired by those on the American side who really do not want to have to do anything about acid rain in the foreseeable future. Under the report of the envoys, the Americans have at least five years, or even beyond that, to continue to do very little or nothing. The Minister of the Environment (Mr. McMillan) once said in committee that the acid rain issue would be the litmus test of whether or not the new approach to Canada-America relations was any good. So far I think the litmus test has proved to be just that type of test, only we have failed the test.

I do not want to spend too much time on the acid rain issue since we have the other problem of the toxic chemical pollution of the Great Lakes to consider. With regard to the Great Lakes, I say to the Government, we have to do everything we can when we find pollution on our side, to deal with it as effectively, as firmly and as immediately as we would want the Americans to deal with those pollutants which are affecting our environment. If we do not do this, then we will not be in a good position when we go to them and ask them for the very kind of action that we ourselves are reluctant to take. I believe the Government has undermined its own position on a number of occasions, particularly regarding Great Lakes pollution, although not so much with acid rain, an issue on which the Government has gone ahead. The Government undermined its position, particularly under the former Minister of the Environment and will increasingly do so under this Minister if we continue to receive nothing but rhetoric. The Minister, however, has a little time yet before he can be judged on whether he only speaks well, or, if he actually acts.

● (1250)

I was interested to hear the Minister of National Health and Welfare say that the Government hoped to be able to deal with these things once it gets the economy going. The fact is that the way the Conservatives propose to get the economy going is through imposing a deregulatory atmosphere on the Canadian economy and by accepting a notion of international competitiveness which I contend takes us in the opposite direction of where we should be going, if we are, indeed, serious about environmental protection and quality.

One major element of any environmental protection program is going to have to be regulatory in nature. We are going to need more inspectors to ensure that the new standards set by any legislation which might be brought forward are enforced. We are going to need more research so we can adopt better and more informed guidelines. We are going to have to do a lot of things which are going to cost money and which are going to be perceived as a pain in the neck by the business community.