

*Canadian Environmental Protection Act*

(a) consult with the government of any province, any government department or agency or any person interested in the quality of the environment—

It does not mention environmental organizations. Subsection (b) states that the Minister may:

(b) organize conferences of representatives of industry and labour, provincial and municipal authorities and any interested persons described in paragraph (a).

Again, there is an omission. I hope that it was just an omission by inadvertence and that environmental and public interest groups can be added to the list.

The Bill goes on and on with respect to consulting with governments and provinces, organizing conferences with industry and labour, provincial and municipal authorities, and any persons interested in the preservation and improvement of public health. There are organizations directly involved in environmental public health. They have experts who are very committed people. One of the things the Government ought to realize is that one of the resources that we have available is public spirit and knowledge, the commitment of people. Canada has a great history of voluntary organizations working in all types of areas. These people give their expertise to Government, as well as their knowledge and passion in working on these questions over the years. We should be grateful and pleased that we have the benefit of this type of advice. We should be pleased to receive it and not omit it from the list, having them come to us importuning to be consulted. We would like to see some changes in language to include these people.

The Liberal critic in his remarks yesterday on this subject noted that as well as dealing with imports and with manufacturing of toxic substances there ought to be regulations with respect to exports. I do not know how extensive a problem this is, but on principle I agree that if a substance is too toxic to import to Canada and to manufacture here then any of it that we already have ought not to be exported but ought to be dealt with in some other way. It would certainly be very wrong to consider it all right to get rid of it by exporting it to some other country.

Although I agree with a good part of the substance of the Liberal spokesperson's remarks, I cannot entirely understand his outrage at the Government's failure to enact many of the measures which he has urged it to enact. The environmental problems we have did not begin to develop after September 4, 1984 when the Conservative Party was elected to form the Government. These problems have been around for a very long time, and they have been increasing gradually.

Almost everything that the Hon. Member recommended that ought to be done encompassed measures that he himself could have undertaken when he was Minister. It is unfortunate that this matter should be seen as a politically partisan one. It would be far better to ensure that we work together on these issues. Certainly, his outrage at the Government's failure to act when he had the opportunity to do so is quite unjustified.

*[Translation]*

Naturally, we have to pass this Bill, and I hope that we can pass it with amendments which will make it stronger and more effective. In any case, I shall oppose no measure to protect the environment, even one as weak as this Bill.

I shall be proposing amendments at the committee. I invite the environmental groups to play a vigorous role in the consideration by the committee. The New Democratic Party will continue to fight to achieve real protection of the environment.

*[English]*

Let us get on with this Bill. The Government could help enormously by announcing very promptly its willingness to accept amendments now. I would be pleased to see the Government announce a willingness to work with opposition Members and ecology groups to make this as effective a Bill as it can be, given the limitations of the subject matter.

I hope that the Government will also give an undertaking of its willingness to bring in a real charter of rights for the environment, as well as really strong and effective measures to make the environment the top consideration and to give citizens the right to protest, to go to court to insist that the Minister act to enforce and to implement the Bill. We must ensure that the Department of the Environment is the Department which will be involved in the enforcement of environmental measures, that the powers in the Bill will not be dispersed to those who will have conflicting obligations in the here and now as opposed to the long term. I hope that the Government will give this type of undertaking.

Canadians are becoming increasingly concerned about the environment. I do not have to urge the Government to read the public opinion polls with respect to this subject. I just hope it will look at them seriously and see that they reflect changing opinions, opinions that are developing for very good reasons. Jobs depend on the environment, as do future jobs. People are concerned about health, the health of their children, their grandchildren as well as their economic health, not to mention their day-to-day health. As we have an increasingly diseased environment, the enjoyment of life decreases. People are beginning to say, "We have to take steps now. We cannot afford to have this slack approach of everything will take care of itself and all we have to do is make money and the environment will clean itself up". People know that that does not work. They realize the extent of the damage that has already been done. Canadians want strong national standards for water, air and land. They want stronger enforcement measures.

This Bill introduces the beginning of criminal sanctions for environmental destruction. Ten years ago that would have been unthinkable. At that time public opinion was not there. Environmental destruction was just considered to be something that happened in the process of business. People do not see it that way now. People want strong standards. Nobody wants to see criminal sanctions actually used, but people are prepared