

*Energy Supplies Emergency Act*

the government, since it has a board which advises it from time to time, can go to the board and ask it where it expects the government might have to relax the environmental standards. Surely this is a legitimate question for government members to ask; but I do not hear any of them asking it. I do not hear anyone on the other side of the House even beginning to try to persuade me or any other hon. member that this legislation is necessary. When one looks back at the history of environmental legislation in this country, we find that it was a phenomenon that the government, under pressure, established the Department of the Environment.

It was also only under pressure that the government passed the Clean Air Act and the Canada Water Act, which legislation, as I said earlier in this address, was carefully designed to make sure that the federal power does not push too hard in any direction. Yet without any evidence or definitive explanation concerning where these laws will be abridged, if there is a need, the federal government pushes in and tells Canadians from coast to coast in every province that at the whim of a five-man board, if it should so decide, any environmental law can be abridged.

I say that is an extraordinary situation and not one in which I am happy to hand over to the government that sort of power. Government speakers may say the federal government has not pushed for this power because it encouraged the provinces and coaxed them along. I wonder how much coaxing the government did, and I wonder how much provincial legislation has come to pass because there was no federal legislation. Certainly in many areas this is so. The fact is that because the federal government did not provide strong leadership in the environmental situation the provinces have moved as fast as they have.

There is always cause for concern whether in certain cases provincial legislation might be adequate, and one wonders where the federal government is. I notice on page two of today's *Globe and Mail* an article concerning lead poisoning. I should like to quote from this article as follows:

Officials from the environment and the health ministries have expressed concern at the effectiveness of existing pollution legislation, doctors have expressed anger that children they treated have to be sent back to the areas where they were initially poisoned, researchers claim that lead contamination levels have not been significantly reduced and the level of public exasperation has been skyrocketing.

I ask why the federal government has not applied its power and force to look at this sort of thing. The fact of the matter is that the federal government has pretty well neglected to move on the environmental front. I know someone could tell me about the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act which sat on the shelf for a long time before there were any regulations. Someone could tell me about other acts and regulations. But for the most part the federal government, except under the Fisheries Act, has not much power within the provinces or has not had the courage to exercise it. However, here we have a crisis which is not very well explained and in respect of which a number of intelligent people—I am not talking about anybody in the political process at all, but people commenting

[Mr. Fraser.]

from the sidelines—ask just how grave a crisis we really face.

I think we legitimately pose a question here. I believe the question is: Why has the federal government decided now to use this power to abridge environmental laws? Members of the government have failed to try to address their minds to the problem in this debate. I think probably my friends and colleagues on the government side may well be asking the same question. No doubt part of the reason they are asking that question is the extraordinary exchange which took place a few days ago between myself and the Minister of the Environment. On Tuesday, December 4, as recorded at page 8388 of *Hansard*, I asked this question of the Minister of the Environment:

Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of the Environment. Can he assure the House that the provisions of clause 24 of Bill C-236, whereby the energy supplies allocation board is empowered to override environmental laws, will not apply to pollution control standards or to permits issued by provincial governments?

The minister replied:

No, Mr. Speaker. I cannot assure the hon. member of that. However, we are working very closely with provincial authorities and we have the closest liaison possible with the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources.

I wonder how closely the government has been working with the provincial authorities. A few days after this I had occasion to reach officials of the government of British Columbia on the telephone, and officials in most departments to whom I spoke said they had barely heard that this act was in the mill. From what I could gather there had been no close liaison in respect of this particular section. On the same day I then asked this question:

In view of the fact that for a good number of years some hon. members, including members on the government side, have worked very hard to establish good environmental laws, can the minister advise whether clause 24 will apply? Will he make a statement to make it clear to the House that environmental standards are not going to be sacrificed across this country just because of an energy shortage in some parts, and will he tell the House why the power to regulate relaxation of environmental law is given to five appointed officials without any provision for appeal or public discussion?

This is the extraordinary reply given by the Minister of the Environment:

Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is correct in suggesting that that clause can suspend environmental standards. At the same time, I know of no existing federal or provincial legislation which will in fact be overridden.

Mr. Speaker, I repeat that the Minister of the Environment said that he knows of no existing federal or provincial legislation which will in fact be overridden. If the Minister of the Environment does not know of any provincial or federal legislation which will be overridden, what in heaven's name are we doing passing this piece of legislation?

I ask every member on the government side, because I know they surely are not here to try to deliberately override the environmental laws in this country, to speak to the Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and to the Prime Minister and ask them what in the name of heaven is meant by that remark. We are talking about emergency legislation. We are talking about an act which, apart completely from the envi-