

*Supply*

Americans, I think, and I say this as a grandson of an American, are basically rational human beings, however irrationally they might perform on the world stage from time to time. If you want to sway them, you have to be able to present a strong case and Canada certainly has a strong scientific and factual case to present. Americans will not accept, and Canada does not need, attempts at persuasion that are grounded in ill manners, shrill sermonizing and in taking cheap shots.

Canada and the United States have been negotiating on transboundary water related issues for nearly 80 years, twice as long as I have been living on the face of this earth. Much progress has been made in those eight decades, but never before in the history of our two countries, until this week, have we achieved an agreement on a major reduction in toxic loadings in any Canada-U.S. waterway, let alone in the Niagara River. Yet the problem is long term and the solution will remain the same, despite our current progress.

At this point we have an agreement, an accord, an understanding, an entente, a meeting of minds, if you will—deficient in some ways, imperfect as human instruments frequently are, and certainly not what I would have preferred in an ideal world. But the agreement is a very good start toward solving a problem that has bedevilled Canadians for more than half a century.

Americans and Canadians are now committed to establishing specific goals to cut toxic loadings substantially. Our immediate target for our two countries is a 50 per cent reduction by 1995 or sooner. I stress "sooner". It will be very clear by July, 1987, whether we can both advance that timetable and increase the reductions. At that time, high level scientific discussions will make it possible to refine targets and dates. I stress that the plan addresses all of the toxic substance problems in the Niagara, including municipal and industrial point source contamination, dumpsite leakage and run-off.

• (1430)

Canada would certainly prefer to deal with the dump site problem by excavating. As the Hon. House Leader of the NDP (Mr. Deans) pointed out, that is a preferred option. I am talking about completely removing toxins, sediment, debris, embankments and all other contaminated materials to be found on both sides of the Niagara River, especially on the American side. If the Americans were to excavate only the worst sites in and around the Niagara frontier, they would have to deal with an area of several hundred acres. The size of all of the dumpsites in the Niagara area is equivalent to the Province of Prince Edward Island, from which I come. We are talking about a lot of space, a lot of toxins, a lot of sediments, a lot of debris, and a lot of embankments to be excavated. Once the material was dug up, it would either have to be removed to a safer place, if such could be found, or destroyed completely.

There are three considerations to take into account consistent with the preferred excavation model, three major

technological obstacles weigh heavily on American officials and scientists in that connection.

First, as Canada's Pollution Probe has noted, based on work on excavation it has been doing on contract for Environment Canada, digging up the dumps is highly risky because the buried chemicals are, by definition, extremely volatile and emit dangerous fumes that could injure workers and area residents.

Second, even if the millions of tonnes of excavated material could be handled safely, which is a big assumption, the political problems, in the best sense of the word "political", aside from the scientific and technological problems, present enormous obstacles to the completion of the option we prefer. The problems of relocating the amount of toxic materials with which the toxic chemicals have come in contact with over the years are horrendous. Canada is not the only country in the world afflicted by the NIMBY, "not in my backyard", syndrome. The Americans have a real problem, given their uniform population, finding any community in which to locate the substances until such time as they can be incinerated safely.

Third, if the material were to be incinerated instead of relocated, the sheer volume of material to be destroyed presents technical problems, as well as genuine threats to human health and the natural environment. I am now talking about incineration rather than relocation or the process of excavating. Indeed, massive incineration, which would be involved, given the sheer volume of the chemical substances at stake, would produce pollution often as bad as, if not worse than, the substances being burned, including cancer-causing dioxins.

As a result of the technological and scientific considerations, the Americans favour extracting the toxins and destroying them on site. There is a problem of semantics. People tend to use "extraction" and "excavation" as though they were synonymous when they are, in fact, two different processes. Rather than excavating the sites themselves, extraction involves treating the sites and handling them in such a way so that they become virtually hermetically sealed units from which the toxins could be extracted. Mr. Thomas acknowledges, however, that excavation might well need to be applied at certain sites and that extraction would be used only where it was more effective than excavation in dealing with wastes that had seeped into surrounding bedrock.

To guide both countries in choosing the safest and most effective method for each dumpsite, whether using extraction or excavation, Mr. Thomas and I agreed to mobilize the best scientific minds in both countries for a major international working conference to be held over many days, even weeks if necessary, probably in Toronto, in the fall.

I emphasize again that the plan to which I am referring is not the one which, in isolation, other things being equal, the Government of Canada itself would have devised if it were putting together a program for the Americans. However, it reflects a major impact by Canada on the American approach