

Water Resources

Mr. Perrault: The important measure before us reflects the concern of Canadians of all parties. We are all concerned about it, because we are all affected by it. It does not matter whether we vote Liberal, Conservative or NDP, we are all concerned with the quality of our environment and the pollution of that environment in recent years. We are concerned with the pollution of air, water and soil because this costs Canadians an estimated \$1.175 billion per year, or \$72 per capita. About \$22 per year per capita is attributable, we are assured by experts, to water pollution; yet there are people parading around this country, some occupying responsible positions, who say the smell of pollution is the smell of money. That is the old theme song. In terms of the cost to Canada today, we are all losers even on the economic side, let alone the sociological and health side.

When our environment is threatened by industrial wastes, sewage, chemicals or by any other agent, we know we are on a collision course with disaster unless we act now to guard our heritage of natural resources. Increasingly the problem of pollution threatens to render this planet uninhabitable. Some regard this kind of statement as scientific fiction—you meet these people every day in Canada—and a vast overstatement of the fact. They say the “in” thing now is to talk about pollution; everybody is talking about it and you might as well join the parade, but don’t believe what you hear, Charlie! In their hearts they still regard the smell and sight of pollution as one of the inevitable byproducts of industrial progress; they still see in Canada a land with limitless possibilities for further damage to the environment without any measurable harm being done.

The fact is that man’s technical ability to create and destroy, combined with a rapid increase in world population, has been associated with alterations in the environment which are not only unpleasant and harmful to health, but which may be altering, quite irreversibly, man’s natural habitat. It is no longer true to say that the effect of mankind’s activities on his environment are minimal.

The Canada Water Act was attacked here tonight and earlier during the debate as being insufficient and lacking the power to stop pollution in Canada. I do not think anyone on the government side suggests for a moment that this legislation is an end. We say it is a beginning; it is one step in the national effort to arrest this trend before it is too late.

[Mr. Perrault.]

We are blessed with the largest freshwater supply in the world, and the Canada Water Act expresses Canada’s determination to protect that water. The days of unlimited exploitation are over: that is the message of this bill. We are seeing the beginning of a co-operative attack, with the provinces, against pollution and a joint program for comprehensive water resource development based upon the most modern management methods available.

The Canadian Water Act reflects—this was touched upon by the previous speaker—the limitations of confederation under the BNA Act. Some have been critical of the federal government for failing to end pollution a long time ago. We all know the BNA Act gives the provinces jurisdiction over water resources; the federal government’s powers have been limited. Despite this fact, previous governments have enacted legislation dealing with water resources, fisheries, pollution of the sea by oil, navigable waters and harbours, protecting waterfowl from oil and other harmful wastes. This is hardly the record of a party not concerned about the problem.

The Boundary Waters Treaty signed in 1909 provided for the establishment of the International Joint Commission, which apportions control of the Great Lakes between the United States and Canada. The commission has recommended action to compel industries and municipalities to treat their waste before dumping it into the lakes and river basins.

A major step forward is to be found in this measure, that of greatly broadening the scope of federal action in conservation and pollution control. This measure can work to the maximum benefit of Canadians only if co-operation is forthcoming from other levels of government. There is no reason to suppose that most of the provinces and municipalities are not thoroughly alarmed about the problem of pollution. Unfortunately, because of the lack of a clear definition of lines of responsibility, pollution has been the pathetic orphan of Canada, shuttled from one jurisdiction to another.

The effort of the federal government at this time should not be condemned but should be encouraged as a step in the right direction. With the full knowledge that a great many people have said much about pollution in recent months, and said it very well—many important things have been said—I suggest that the Canada Water Act and similar measures are vital in the context of worldwide efforts to protect this planet.