

Supply

chemicals in the drinking water? Only a few years ago we were told they were at safe levels. But, in fact, we do not have any definition of content objectives for a quarter of these chemicals.

With respect to the epidemiological question, is the Department going to take initiatives in accordance with the over-all strategy of the Government to address the environmental concerns?

Mr. Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, in reply to the Hon. Member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. McCurdy), he says he is mystified. I will try to take him out of the realm of mystery and into the area of knowledge.

The Member says, for example, that he cannot accept the fact that we have chosen a chemical society. Let us be very practical. I am sure being the kind of person he with the sartorial splendour in which I see him here from day-to-day, that he does not have synthetic fibres in any of his clothes.

Mr. McCurdy: That is not the question.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): I am sure the fibres he wears are all natural. What I am saying to him, Mr. Speaker, is very clearly, yes, in a practical sense this is reality for all of us. The Hon. Member cannot ignore that fact. That is the case. That is truth. He knows it and I know it.

What about the car he gets into tonight? It contains a lot of products from a chemical society. He knows that. He expects to use them and he expects to be transported in that way. He cannot simply say that there is an either/or, black or white situation because that is not the case. The Hon. Member lives with this situation every day. He should not try to project that somehow we can reverse society, or say that it would be a better society if we so chose. I would suggest that it is not. It was for that reason I was smiling, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Member wants very often to make the point that there is a society into which we can revert which will be totally free of chemicals, totally free of any risk—

Mr. McCurdy: I do not remember saying anything like that.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): —and it was for that reason I was smiling.

Let me give the Member one very practical and quick example of what the Government is doing in terms of actions. Last week we announced guidelines on certain dioxins. Previously there were no guidelines. That is the kind of direct approach we took last week. The former Minister of the Environment tells the Government to do more, but those guidelines were not established earlier. We are setting guidelines. Our Government is taking a comprehensive approach from an environmental and a health point of view and, as I also stated, from a transport point of view. It is a total Government commitment which we will continue.

● (1240)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The time for questions and comments has expired. Resuming debate with the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie).

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying a word or two about the environmental problem which is most recent in our minds. That, of course, is the St. Clair River problem on which we received a report just last week. I would like to address the question of guidelines, the subject which was just being debated, before I say the other things I have to say.

It is instructive to remember that of the 58 toxic chemicals found in the St. Clair River there are guidelines for only 23. With respect to what are acceptable toxic levels in fish, we have guidelines for only three of these chemicals. We are still in the dark about a great many things, both with respect to guidelines and with respect to the whole question of guidelines period. Many things which passed for guidelines years ago are now known to be quite unacceptable in terms of guidelines.

It is for this reason that it makes great sense for Members on this side of the House, and for people from other places, to call for the reinstatement of the Guelph Toxicology Centre and the cancellation of those cuts which were made in research by the former Minister of the Environment. If the Government is serious about addressing the myriad environmental problems which we face as a country, then it should want to have at its disposal the very best and latest in research. It can only do that by going back on some of the bad decisions which were made early in the life of this Government, and which I am sure many Members opposite now realize were bad decisions. I ask Members opposite to find the political wherewithal to correct those mistakes.

I am sorry that the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) had to leave the House. I wanted to say to him that to proceed to do some of the things which he outlined on behalf of the Government would certainly be in keeping not just with any narrow concern about the environment but with the concern expressed in the preamble to the Canada Health Act on which he and I worked in a previous Parliament. As a result of an amendment moved by myself it was written into the legislative understanding of Canadian health that we realize it is not just a question of having a medicare system, but a question of dealing with the "social, environmental and occupational causes of disease". At that time I was pleased to have those words written into the Canada Health Act. It is about time that Governments got moving with respect to living up to that preamble in order to see that the type of legislation which needs to be in place is, in fact, put in place.

I would also like to say a word about whether or not we chose to have a chemical society. We could argue at great lengths about the question. The fact of the matter is that a great many decisions which were made about what type of products we would be offered in the market-place were made not by consumers but by people who decided to radically restructure the way things were manufactured in the post-war