The Canadian Labour Congress Workplace Health and Safety Group has criticized Bill C-74 on grounds of it being a step backward in terms of regulation. I would like to cite a few of its comments which I think are very pertinent to our discussion today:

> We are most concerned about Section 37(4), which provides that consultation must take place with the provinces before any regulation goes forward.
>
> We believe that this is a step backwards from existing environmental legislation, such as the Clean Air Act which provides for the federal Government to enact national ambient air emission standards without the necessity of consulting the provinces. We contend that Section 37 in fact will ensure what we have been afraid of all along—that the federal Government has no intention of regulating in the toxic chemical area. We feel that the Minister of the Environment has been getting extremely conservative advice as to federal constitutional authority to protect the environment.

Obviously, the Canadian Labour Congress Workplace Health and Safety group takes the view, as I do, that we have to get away from treating this matter as a provincial-commercial question and begin treating it as a national question of ongoing concerns.

The ClC further states:

> It is our opinion that the federal Government should be setting national standards to ensure that Canada does not create pollution havens.

It actually states that it thinks Clause 37 is an impediment to what has been called "cradle to grave" legislation of chemical substances, that in fact it will not be as thorough and comprehensive as the Government has claimed it will be. The CLC goes further:

> The general principal ought to be: Unless the provinces have stronger legislation, the federal Government should move in to establish minimum—but strong and effective—national standards of environmental cleanliness.
>
> There should be consultation with the interested parties, certainly; but this should not prevent speedy and effective federal Government action on the environment at the national level.

I would heartily concur with that kind of analysis. Apart from the amalgamation parts of this Bill and its non-mandatory guidelines, there is one compulsory part and one new part which does bring in new measures, that is on toxic substances or, let us be very clear, some toxic substances, because even here there are exceptions.

The Environmental Contaminates Act did have deficiencies. It did not allow the Minister to obtain information from industry or from importers unless there was virtual proof that the substance was toxic. In short, there had to be enough information before hand, and, of course, the point is, how do we get the information if we do not have a process? The onus on the Government was to build the case and it could not ask for information from the industry to establish the case.

With respect to new chemicals imported into Canada, and there are about 100 a year—we have 30,000 in Canada already out of some 100,000 chemicals in use globally—existing legislation will require manufacturers or importers to report to Government. The new legislation would set reporting requirements on toxicity, on potential impacts on the environment, on biodegradability, on health studies. The importer would have 90 days to provide this material and, of course, would not be authorized to sell it or import it during this period. The Government would then make the decision whether to allow, prohibit, restrict or to require further information on the chemical.

Because of the great backlog of chemicals already in use which have not been properly scrutinized, there will be a priority substances list established of chemicals which have already been allowed in for use which possible should not be. Once items get on this list, the Government will be assessing them.

Those are the new departures in the Bill. Certainly, I am pleased to see them there. However, I think we will have to look very carefully at the process at committee to ensure that the loopholes which have been built-in, and the possibilities of waiver, and so forth, are not excessive. We have to make sure this process which has been set up is one which will really be effective. I have a few questions about it. I think it is something about which we are going to need some expert advice.

Let me go into a few other very specific points which I think demonstrate the weaknesses of Bill C-74. Right at the beginning of the Bill, after the very weak preamble, Part 1 begins. It refers to the Minister's environmental data and research obligations. Clause 7 states:

> (1) The Minister may
>
> a) establish, operate and maintain a system of environmental quality monitoring stations;

There are then a whole list of good things the Minister may do. But the Minister is not required to do so. I think this is what we are very concerned about. The Minister may collect, process, correlate data, conduct research and studies and so forth. This is non-mandatory, and it is simply not adequate when we realize the severity of the problem right now.

Clause 7(3) states that the Minister may, in exercising the powers conferred, act alone or in co-operation with any government, government department, and so on. I have very specific criticisms with respect to the following subclauses of the Bill. When the groups which may be consulted are listed, the environmental groups are not included. Clause 7(3) states that the Minister may, in exercising his powers, consult with any government, government department or agency, institution or person and may sponsor or assist in any research, studies or planning by any government institution or person in Canada. But it does not mention the environmental groups. I am surprised and somewhat distressed at the omission. Obviously, an environmentalist is an individual who can be consulted.

• (1140)

On page 7 Clause 8(3) states:

> (3) In carrying out the responsibilities conferred by subsection (1), the Minister may—

Again, it is not mandatory.