

Adjournment Debate

● (1840)

I would like to conclude by saying that this Government has recognized that a very difficult problem existed and we have taken action to ameliorate it. The Hon. Member is aware that AECL had first recommended the closure of its heavy water plants in 1982. However, the federal Government of the day believed it impolitic to act on such a recommendation. We gave considerable study to the problem and acceptable options before arriving at our decision. We believe that we have made the only sound decision available and have put into place responsible measures which will direct Cape Breton toward economic renewal.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS—STORAGE OF LETHAL GASES. (B)
TRANSPORTATION OF LETHAL GASES

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Gurbin), whom I welcome back after the summer recess, some questions related to the protection of citizens who live in communities nearby plants or storage sites of lethal gases which are commonly used in the manufacture of pesticides, herbicides or other products. I would also like to ask him a question about the inspection of transportation arrangements for these lethal gases which, as we know, have horrendous consequences on human health.

By way of background, I remind the House that on December 6, 1984, I asked a question of the previous Minister from whom I received a rather inconclusive answer. This makes it necessary for me to pursue the matter further. My question is also intensified by the fact that last August, just south of the border, a spill in West Virginia at a Union Carbide plant occurred. This company was the cause of a very tragic event which occurred in Bhopal, India, in November of last year, where approximately 2,500 people were killed. In the case of Institute, West Virginia, where a Union Carbide plant had a leak of lethal gas, some 135 people were sent to hospital.

What struck me from the newspaper reports of a few days ago is the fact that the Chairman of Union Carbide was quoted as saying that the recent gas leak was "more damaging in a way" than the one that killed more than 2,000 people in Bhopal because it was preventable. When one reads a statement like that, one becomes rather nervous and uneasy.

Since last December, when the question was asked, and since the coming into force of the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act on July 1, have there been any discussions or meetings with provincial and municipal authorities with respect to inspection services, both at the manufacturing plant and the storage sites of dangerous substances. As well, with regard to inspection procedures in the transportation of these goods when they are not a federal responsibility, have there been any discussions? If such discussions or meetings have taken place, I would like to know by whom they were initiated and what is the present state of achieving protection of communities which could be in potential danger in the case of emergency. Can the Parliamentary Secretary indicate whether

or not the inspection staffs in charge of these matters are adequate, both at the plant level, as well as at the transportation level of these goods? I also asked the Parliamentary Secretary how many provinces have on their own brought in or are in the process of bringing in complementary provincial legislation for the protection of Canadians with respect to lethal gases?

● (1845)

There is something very peculiar about this issue, Mr. Speaker, because there are contradictions one can find. I quote from an article in the *New York Times* in January of this year. A company spokesman for the Union Carbide Corporation is quoted as saying:

immediate attention had been given to an internal safety report warning of a possible "runaway reaction" in a tank storing a toxic chemical in West Virginia.

That is the one to which I referred earlier. He continued: a simple change in operating procedures completely eliminated the concern—

Seven months later, in August, a spill takes place at that same plant despite these declarations on the part of a safety official of that company.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I am brought to my feet on this matter after reading a report from the Canadian Press here in Ottawa in June wherein a spokesman for the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police is quoted as saying:

We cannot take on additional duties without dropping something else—

He indicated that the enforcement of the majority of these regulations is best left in the hands of highly qualified and thoroughly trained personnel and that the 258 Ontario inspectors employed across the province are in the same position as the police, they will not be getting any additional personnel. So there seems to be a shortage of people qualified to carry out this very important mandate.

I would like to conclude by saying that we are not talking of a situation which affects communities in Ontario and Quebec alone but in the West as well where we have learned there is a \$3.4 billion plan to export Alberta gas—surplus of natural gas—to Japan and that the communities nearby the liquefied natural gas projects will have to be protected. In essence, it boils down to the fact that it is better to anticipate and prevent than to react and cure. I am sure that the Parliamentary Secretary looks at this matter in the same light and I am most anxious to hear his comments.

Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to welcome my colleague back from the summer recess. He looks like he is in fine form and I can see from his comments that he is carrying on with vigour his usual approach to these important environmental matters. I congratulate him on that.

I believe all Canadians were struck by the tragedy which occurred in Bhopal. It caused the Canadian Government in December of last year to take specific actions which in fact address precisely the points raised by the Hon. Member for