

Surely, even Members of the Opposition might want to bask a bit in the reflected recognition and the international importance of what the Prime Minister, on behalf of Canada, is attempting to do with respect to environmental issues. Surely it is not simply a matter of turning this into something that is bogus or phoney, as we have heard from the other side. This does no service either to Members of the Opposition or to the attempts of an international organization of business interests to take seriously issues of sustainable development, issues which I believe Members on all sides of this House see as critical.

• (1640)

I will return to that in a moment because I think it is central to what I hope would be the main purpose of today's debate. There is no doubt that the cumulative effect of climatic change, the destruction of the ozone layer and of forests, farmlands and waters and the spread of toxic chemicals is being recognized as one of the greatest challenges we face. In its 1987 report entitled *Our Common Future*, the World Commission on Environment and Development said that the threat of environmental destruction is second only to that of nuclear war. That commission, headed by the Norwegian Prime Minister, said that the damage in parts of the earth is already worse than scorched-earth policies of armies. From my own first-hand experience over the last four years, I have seen that kind of destruction. In parts of Ethiopia and Sudan and in parts of West Africa, I have seen what can happen when an environment is so ravaged and loses so much of its capacity for growth that it can turn on its remaining inhabitants and create a situation only akin to a world after a nuclear holocaust.

The commission said:

Nature is bountiful but it is also fragile and finely balanced. There are thresholds that cannot be crossed without endangering the basic integrity of the system. Today we are close to many of those thresholds.

The United Nations-sponsored Brundtland Commission did not call for an economic shut-down to protect the environment. That would be impossible in the industrialized world and simply unfair and unacceptable in the developing world where there are many just beginning to take full advantage of the developments of modern technology. Instead, this global commission issued a new agenda saying that the planet needs a new era of environmentally sound economic development. From now on, the report said, economic decisions must be based upon environmental realities. I am not sure whether it invented this term, but it certainly put front

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and centre the term "sustainable development" to make the link between environment and economy.

Indeed, I was struck when I heard the Liberal critic on environmental matters, the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps), who said at one point in her speech, and I hope I am quoting her accurately, that she felt that Canadians are in fact willing to make the same kind of sacrifices with respect to environmental issues as will be required for the economy. I listened very carefully in the same context to the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Bouchard) who said that in the present situation we have in fact two deficit situations to deal with, a deficit with respect to the present federal debt and the ongoing problems of the cost of the deficit and a deficit in terms of the impact of the increasing degradation and pollution of our environment. That is why I think it is critically important that we understand that we cannot really address one satisfactorily unless we address the other.

Hon. Members will recall that when the Minister of Finance was presenting his Budget, he used some language which I felt was quite eloquent, and I want to repeat it because I believe it has strong application to the issue of environmental protection and sustainable development that we are discussing here today. In addressing the debt issue, he said that we must ask ourselves, should this enormous debt be our legacy to future generations? Let us be clear about what it means. If we continue year after year, Government after Government, to borrow and borrow just to pay the interest on that debt, we would be borrowing from our children, not paying our own bills. It is easy to borrow from future generations because they have no voice in this debate. They have no vote. Yet it is they who must live with the consequences if we do not act. Then he said words which I think have equal applicability to environmental issues and economic issues. He said that this Budget must build for the future, not borrow from it. That is the challenge we are faced with today.

This past summer, I was asked to participate in a conference that took place at Trent University by the Harmony Foundation as a follow-up to the Brundtland Commission. Its report was recently published and I recommend it to all Hon. Members. The remarks that I made fell under a title that I hope I can continue to use on this and other occasions. The title is this: "Good economics and good ecology make good sense". In the speech, if I may be so bold as to quote myself, I said that we are very good at responding to crises and emergencies. However, we do not know a great deal. We are not sure how to work with people at getting at the underlying causes that create these crises in the first place. That is