

Water Resources

by means of an amendment to the Criminal Code.

I endorse the whole of the committee report. That particular recommendation, however, runs afoul of this bill. Here a multiplicity of regions are to be established, with each setting its own standards. There is to be no national standard, no national enforcement—nothing. This is what we protest and will continue to protest through organizations all over the country which are becoming interested in fighting pollution and are demanding, regardless of jurisdictional difficulties, that the problem be solved. We shall not let the government get out from under this problem by saying it is a constitutional one which it cannot tackle and which it will pass on to the provinces, thus avoiding giving proper leadership.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, we now have before us a bill on water pollution and water resources, etc. There is no doubt that such a bill is necessary.

At the rate we are polluting our rivers, though knowing that the population in Canada and in the United States is bound to increase, we can ask ourselves what we are heading for if we persist in so doing.

I feel that the bill introduced by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Greene) will not be opposed, although it cannot by itself settle the complex problem of water pollution, since the federal government has no exclusive jurisdiction in that field. In fact, we should ask ourselves to what extent the provinces are willing to fight water pollution.

In my opinion, the provincial governments are aware of this problem. But the provinces, municipalities and industries do not always have at their disposal the necessary means to fight water pollution nor do they have the engineers or technicians required. It is those who are able to pay, those who do research work and give advice who should take the situation in hand.

● (9:10 p.m.)

I was reading recently that only 3 per cent of all the water in the world is fit to drink, of which 2 per cent is made up of ice at the poles or on high mountains. Therefore, there is very little drinkable water available and if we do not take the necessary steps to protect this element essential to life, we will soon be faced with very serious problems since water pollution already exists.

I live in a rather new and small town of northwestern Quebec through which runs a small river. At the very beginning of colonization, sewage facilities were rather primitive, as can be expected; everything went into the river. Today, if a human being or an animal falls into a river, even if it does not get drowned, it is almost condemned to death, so polluted is the water.

This water at home flows into lake Abitibi which is fairly large. It gets cleaned up there, it evaporates but if several towns were established in this region or if the population increased and kept on acting in this way, within a very short time water from lake Abitibi would no longer be usable.

Similar cases are to be found almost everywhere. What proposals are made? Municipalities are invited to build water treatment plants. The National Housing Act suggests a plan under which loans may be granted to municipalities that wish to benefit from such services. Considering that nearly all municipalities are already deep in debt, that they have to borrow money at prohibitive rates of interest, and that most of them cannot pay for the construction of water treatment plants, they must get better assistance.

According to the information the minister sent us before introducing the bill in the House, industries are requested to arrange for used water treatment. This could be the best solution. It remains that production costs will necessarily increase and finally, the consumer will be the one to pick the tab.

We should therefore invite those who are in a position to do so to contribute to that project, either by levying some new taxes in order to help the municipalities to treat their sewage or by making grants and offering tax exemptions to the industries for that purpose.

The Canadian citizen will be unable, in my opinion, to avoid the cost of treatment in spite of the steps which could be taken. There are some technical methods to treat sewage and clean up the water but such facilities can entail considerable expenses.

In my municipality, a saw-mill was set up only a few months ago and it was necessary to equip it with a garbage incinerator. Knowing that he would shortly be compelled to install an incinerator to avoid polluting the air, the owner took the necessary steps in order to ensure the immediate treatment of smoke and waste.

If the new industries at least did the same, it may be that in a few years, the problem of