

*Government Orders*

Broad areas of environmentally significant decision making were untouched by assessment requirements.

This is the old legislation, which is superior actually to this Bill C-78. This is where we are now.

Meanwhile, environmental challenges grew. In the Brundtland commission report, we have now faced global scale threats which require significant departures from business as usual. This is a world commission on environment and development, chaired by former Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. The essential environmental challenge facing all nations is that current human demands and practices considered at a global level are not environmentally sustainable. To put it bluntly, as Bob Gibson cites, we are killing the plant. This is where we have to move from the short-term considerations to the long-term view.

This is what not just Canadians but citizens of the world are feeling frustrated with. The legislators seemed inadequate up to date to realize that. We are not talking election to election. We are talking into the next century. I think that anyone who has children and has a responsibility to leaving this world a better place for them must realize that we have to give up that mindset. We have to think long term.

The major roots of the problem include the general failure in the past to ensure that biophysical and socio-economic factors were considered along with the usual financial and technical considerations in government and corporate decision making. What we are talking about is the test of sustainability, incorporating that test of sustainability into corporate and government decision making. It is much easier said than done. I am not going to be shy in admitting that. It is a major challenge facing legislators.

Once we get our heads around what the major principles are, I think that we are up to it. Let us give this House some credit. There are intelligent people here on both sides of the House. I know that will come as a surprise, given the kind of environment out there, the kind of psychic environment that we are all no-goods. I think that kind of psychic environment really degrades what most of us here are about, that we are trying to make a contribution. This kind of flimflammy on the part of the government on Bill C-78 just feeds that psychic environment.

We must pass the test of sustainability when we are talking about the environmental assessment. We recognize the difficulties. We recognize the challenges. We cannot turn our backs to that. It is just too important.

There are no viable options. There are none. I know that we can get ourselves really depressed considering what the options are if we fail in this. If we continue along the same old way, business as usual, we know what is facing us. We know that we are in big trouble environmentally, not just in Canada but globally.

We as a developed country, as a rich country, have a responsibility to take a lead in developing this kind of legislation. We could be a model for the international community, but we are losing that option if this bill goes through because it is flawed. It is terribly flawed. Because we have a responsibility as a developed country, we have the means, we have the educational facilities, we have the economic options that many of the countries of the world do not have.

We know that one of the strongest determinants for environmental degradation is poverty. We certainly have poverty in Canada, far too much for my liking, but when we consider what is going on in Brazil, Indonesia, El Salvador, or the desertification in Africa and when we consider the kind of options we have compared to the options of those people in those countries, we are very well off.

Of course we have a responsibility to Canadians. As legislators in the House of Commons that is where our first responsibility lies, but we have to stop thinking just in terms of national borders. We have to think about our global environment. That is where I think the short-sightedness, the short-term thinking of this kind of legislation really fails us. Environmental assessment must therefore begin long before a project or other undertaking is proposed. The change of mindset is essential.

• (1750)

I want to give a little of example of what I mean by that. If, for example, the problem is an anticipated gap between electricity supply and demand, it matters greatly whether the problem is treated as a deficiency of supply, implying a need for additional generating capacity, or an excess of demand, implying a need for conservation and efficiency measures.