

*Government Orders*

indicate and prove that we have the well-being and the health of present and future generations at heart.

In Prince Rupert in May 1990 the leader of our party put it rather well when he said: "We must set national standards and vigorously enforce federal laws. We must also pay attention to the urgent necessity of integrating the environment into economic decision making. We must examine development projects before they are undertaken". The Leader of the Official Opposition went on to say: "I want the Department of the Environment to play the same watchdog role with respect to the environmental impact of decisions as the Treasury Board does in regard to spending impacts. A Liberal government will apply the federal environmental assessment process the way it is meant to be applied, the way Canadians want it to be applied, with full public participation".

These are important conclusions on the part of our leader. They are in contrast to the expectations that were raised and the failure to implement such expectations by the former Minister of the Environment. In June 1990 the then Minister of the Environment made an announcement. We were all pleasantly surprised by that announcement regarding policy proposals to cabinet, not just projects, policy proposals. This is quite a wide ranging statement and not just the construction of an interprovincial bridge or the widening of railway tracks or the construction of an airport. The then Minister of the Environment of the present government in 1990 went public and said that policy proposals to cabinet would be assessed for their environmental impact.

We were all cheering. We were enthusiastic. We thought this was the beginning of a new era. This was almost the environmental millennium we had been hoping for. We cannot find the evidence of that statement in Bill C-13. When we pressed the present minister on the implementation of this commitment, the present minister said that he did not have the methodology to assess policy and environmentally sustainable development.

He went on to assure us that somehow the North American free trade agreement is or will be assessed for its environmental impact. Nobody is quite clear on that aspect.

Here, as you can see Madam Speaker, we have moved from a general commitment to have proposals, government policies, assessed from an environmental point of view to a much narrower field, namely projects, what the Minister of Public Works may propose or the Minister of Transport, you name it, but certainly not the totality of governmental decisions. Of course, the difference between the two is enormous.

• (1640)

Today, in response to a question on the Order Paper, the Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs informed me and the House that despite the fact that the constitutional document was a cabinet approved policy document and the proposals to entrench property rights is part of that document, the minister said: "It is premature to consider the question of an assessment of the environmental impact". What is premature about that? Is it premature to make a policy statement and then to have the policy statement assessed environmentally once it has been approved? It is a very peculiar way of thinking.

It makes me conclude that conceptually this government has not yet come to grips with the implications of sustainable development. It has the capacity to theorize about it, to exhort and to promote it in theory, but when it comes to practice it falls flat.

This is why one can understand the comments made by the member for Western Arctic which were pretty incisive when she said on March 10: "The fact is that Canada's own environmental regulations have proved so far to be totally ineffective in stopping environmentally damaging projects despite court orders for federal review". The Oldman River project in Alberta and the Rafferty—Alameda project in Saskatchewan, and one might also add Kemano II, were recently built without prior environmental impact assessment by the Government of Canada.

The member went on to say: "The people of Canada want strong and independent environmental legislation which must bind government." She went on to say: "My party is committed to the concept of an Auditor General of the Environment which would provide a buffer against the crass, political manipulation which presently occurs in Canadian environmental review processes". She is dead on and I congratulate her for having made that very