

*Canadian Environmental Protection Act*

against them. Thus we have Bill C-74, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. It talks about consolidating agencies and providing some new penalties, in some cases, and totally misses the whole point of the exercise.

The reason I wanted to intervene in the debate is to express my hope that at some point we will have a serious environmental debate. I hope it will be a non-partisan debate. I do not think this is a Tory, Liberal or New Democratic issue. We all share it. We all have to live in it. Therefore, we all have to be concerned about it. We have become captive to fallacious thinking. We have allowed ourselves to become so imbued with the wrong values that we do not see what is essential and important versus what is peripheral and marginal. We may be more prepared to accept that it is crucial to have green garbage bags versus paper and that that somehow is a great sign of society's progress, while not recognizing that the production of such products are the basic root cause of many of the environmental problems we now face. I am not here to pick on green garbage bags. But they are symbolic of the kind of matters we face. I could point to all kinds of areas where we simply do not get to the root cause of what is spoiling our environment.

I simply say that a Bill such as the one that is before us is fundamentally useless. It is simply window-dressing. It is throwing hot air at a problem. It will not come to grips with what I think the country faces.

In the moment or two that I have remaining I would like to say that one would think that we should be providing some degree of leadership on this issue as a so-called sophisticated, well-developed industrial society so that other countries which are emerging into that status might get some signal as to how to prepare themselves. Instead, we are doing the opposite. I am reminded of what I think is one of the greatest criminal acts of the century. I refer to the disaster in Bhopal, India. In a sense it was a corporate decision to put into a Third World country a plant that was unsafe. Granted, India is a powerful country, but it is still a country of the Third World. The plant was placed there on the grounds that it would make good economic sense.

Our cavalier disregard for the environment and, in fact, for human life is staggering. For those who have travelled in Third World countries, and I think many Members of the House have done that, and have seen how that example is repeated time and time again, we can see that we are even less careful in other countries than we are in our own, if that is possible. We have more disregard for the environment and more disdain for proper protection and controls. We always justify that by saying that we are doing them a big favour and that we are providing jobs because we are introducing the industrial society to countries that need a lot of help. However, I am not sure that the help is always of the best kind.

• (1330)

My recent trip to Central America made me cry at times to see how beautiful countryside with gorgeous lakes and forests was being ruined. For example, a plant which made batteries was spewing its effluents into a lake and destroying it for generations, for centuries. It is tragic.

I am reminded of a particular quotation—and I do not know who said it—that one thing which distinguishes human beings from all other kinds of life is that we are the only ones who befool our own nests, that we have achieved such a high level of maturity and understanding that we know how to poison ourselves and the environment around us.

I do not want to take a lot of time dealing with the particulars of the Bill. The Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia), our environmental critic, has done a superb job, and other Members of the House have spoken. However, I am here this afternoon, and Friday afternoons seem to bring out the whimsy and oftentimes seem to provide opportunities for one to say things in which one really believes. Let us quit tinkering. Let us quit lecturing on navigation as the ship is going down. I believe most Canadians want us to do something serious about the environment. Let us quit playing charades as we see than in Bill C-74 and do something worth while for a change.

**Mr. Keeper:** Mr. Speaker, in the absence of a question from the government side, and in order to further this debate, let me indicate that I was interested in the comments of my colleague with regard to the transportation of dangerous goods. They were really educational in the sense that he said that when the Government of which he was a part faced an important issue involving the environment, rather than dealing with the central question, which was the banning of the transportation of dangerous goods through large metropolitan areas, it dealt with many other peripheral matters. They were probably important but they were peripheral.

I appreciate the frankness of my colleague in this area, and I wonder whether he can educate us in other areas. Were there other areas, when he was Minister in the last Liberal Government, in which the Government failed to come to grips with central questions as they affect the environment? Could the Hon. Member elaborate upon that for us?

**Mr. Axworthy:** Mr. Speaker, I thought one confession per afternoon would be enough.

First let me say that I did not use that example by way of doing a *mea culpa* or a sort of public self-flagellation. I was trying to demonstrate how Governments themselves are reflective of a broader point of view in society.

We began to address seriously the movement of dangerous goods. We attempted to go beyond dealing with the effects of an accident and to deal with the causes of it. We seriously considered how to reduce speeds, to bring them down to a point where we would substantially reduce the probability of accidents. It was something we were beginning to work at