

to the point of ridiculousness. It was not the thing then to be concerned about the future, or the possible non-future, of the environment. But in the last decade we have heard increasingly of the danger of pollution, so much so that now a great body of material has been written indicating that the natural resources of this earth are not inexhaustible, and certainly not those within our own jurisdiction.

There seems to be one attitude—perhaps this is the attitude reflected by what the government is about to do—that we should merely take some kind of band-aid approach to what is really a most basic problem. This approach to pollution is: “We will simply try and muddle through as best we can and dampen down the most glaring evidences of pollution that affect some aspect of our land, our water or our air”. If the minister’s attitude is being correctly reflected here this afternoon, there seems to be a willingness to adopt a kind of fire engine approach in which you rush in, put some water on the fire, and hope that everything will be taken care of, instead of having a positive desire to, in some instances, effect a very major restructuring of industries or undertakings that are continually contributing to pollution.

The minister indicated a few moments ago that it was very difficult to define what is meant by “controlling pollution”. However, that is the phrase used in the bill. It may be that we are faced with some kind of good-guy approach and there will be an attempt to deal with the problems of pollution without causing too much sweat or getting too many people upset. That approach may satisfy some people but it certainly does not satisfy me, and I do not think it satisfies the hon. member who introduced this amendment.

I suggest that if we are serious about dealing with pollution, we must concern ourselves with preventive measures. We must, in many cases, get at the root cause of pollution, which in itself is a continuing problem. In the final analysis, if we are to make a major change in our attitude in this country, the emphasis will not be placed on controlling pollution, because that could mean anything. Certainly, it does not indicate the department is going to adopt the attitude of trying to eliminate pollution; it simply means that the department is going to involve itself in some way with pollution, which might amount merely to making some kind of report on a regular basis, or taking some other superficial or limited approach to the problem. If the commitment of this new department is, in effect, the eradication of pollution, then the word “prevention” must be in this bill. It is not just a question of semantics; it is a question of basic attitude.

● (3:40 p.m.)

If the minister feels, as he mentioned a moment ago, that there is an important question of interpretation and that there is a sophistication beyond this House in terms of drafting this legislation, then I suggest we should allow the clause to stand. I think this whole matter will have to be debated quite seriously at some stage, but in this instance at least if he feels there is a question which

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should be resolved by the law officers of the Crown, or whoever drafted this bill in its final form, surely we should allow the clause to stand. I do not want to put words into the hon. member’s mouth, but I am sure the mover of this amendment would be quite willing to allow it to stand so that there could be sufficient consultation to clear up any difficulties and make sure it will not jeopardize any other legal aspect of the bill.

I suggest it will not be enough for this government to say: “Sure, this is what we mean. We are concerned with the eradication of pollution, or, we are concerned primarily with preventing pollution and that is the reason we are setting up this new department”. Words from the minister or any other members of this House, if I may say so without disrespect to their own worth or sincerity, mean nothing. They mean nothing in so far as the legal interpretation of this bill is concerned. If we are serious, and if the government is serious, in eliminating, removing and preventing pollution, then clear-cut language has to be used in the establishment of this new department. I do not really think it is possible for the minister to pass the matter off by saying it is a question of definition or the problem is already covered in some sort of general way.

The essence of the commitment of this government and this department is, in fact, to eradicate pollution from this country. This is about as basic as anything can be in respect of the establishment of this department and in respect of dealing effectively with the growing problems of pollution in this country.

Mr. Harding: Mr. Chairman, I endorse the words of the last two members who spoke from this side of the House. Let me point out to the minister and the government that we are not here to harass them with amendments. We have done a lot of thinking about this problem. We have delved into this matter and we are convinced this amendment will tighten up the legislation. That is why we brought it forward. There is absolutely no doubt about the fact that the people of Canada want a good bill which will give the department the power to get at the pollution problems facing the nation. We are not certain about the wording of this bill and we have put a great deal of time and study on it. We are not convinced that it covers everything.

I am quite willing to let this amendment stand if the government wants to have a little more time to check it to find out how it will affect the other clauses of the bill. This debate may continue for a day or two and the government will have ample time to take up this matter with the appropriate staff. I have no objection at all to allowing this amendment to stand if that is the wish of the minister or the members of the committee. That would suit me just fine. Let me point out that last year we fought the Canada Water Act in the House. We were fighting for national standards and for the need for industry to recycle the effluent within the factory fences. What do we find now? Within six months after the bill passed the man who will be the new minister of this department travelled throughout Canada saying the very things we enunciated six, seven or eight months before.