

*Water Resources Programs*

● (5:20 p.m.)

Why does the government introduce a bill so incomplete and so weak? Is it because it would not want to assume all its responsibilities in the field of pollution?

One may wonder whether we really want with this bill to control something or get somewhere. It is true that it is only a beginning, and it is certainly a very small beginning. This is precisely why I blame the minister and the government for not showing a more positive attitude with regard to Bill C-144.

**Hon. Théogène Ricard (Saint-Hyacinthe):** Mr. Speaker, before the motion on third reading is passed, I should like to make a few remarks.

Here again, we face a smoke screen created by this government. If the government had really wanted to do something to prevent pollution, it would certainly have accepted the amendments from the opposition, the object of which was simply to make the act more effective so as to prevent pollution.

If there is a subject of vital importance at the present time, it is surely water pollution. We enjoy a very large supply of drinking water, but at the rate things are going now, it will not be many years before water becomes polluted almost everywhere in Canada.

One realizes the importance and great value of water once one is deprived of it. And it would be regrettable if through the wavering of the government and the lack of measures to preserve all the drinking water we need, the Canadian people were deprived of a blessing with which Providence gratified them so generously.

It is unfortunate also—I think it needs to be said—that the minister, while on a recent visit to the United States, did not miss the opportunity of antagonizing our neighbours to the South as to our water resources. I believe the minister should have weighed his words so as not to antagonize our southern neighbours, for we have much to do in cooperation with them as regards the preservation and improvement of our waters.

On many occasions, members of the opposition have asked the minister and the government to state their intentions as regards giving teeth to the law. But it was impossible to have the minister state clearly that those responsible for water pollution would have to pay for the damage.

It is unfortunate, as I say, that the government should not have taken more drastic steps in order to put the onus of the bill on those who do not care about the preservation of our waters, for there must be a halt to this kind of pollution.

Though this measure is far from perfect and utterly devoid of any kind of provision likely to give it any muscle, still, I think it is a beginning. We should give the minister a chance to prove he really wants to achieve something. I therefore urge him to start talks with the representatives of the provinces whose cooperation he will certainly need if he expects this indispensable natural resource we call water, to be preserved and escape as far as possible the pollution caused by those who are indifferent to the common good.

[*English*]

**Mr. Keith Hymmen (Kitchener):** I appreciate the opportunity to make a few brief remarks on third reading of Bill C-144. In an interjection a day or so ago I said that those of us on the government side who had the opportunity to consider this important piece of legislation in committee were rather tempted to enter debate on the report stage of the bill. We have our opportunity now, and so I should like to make a few comments.

The hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Harding), in his very forceful but rather unconvincing manner, has time and time again stressed the objections of the New Democratic Party to this bill. The hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka (Mr. Aiken), on one occasion that I recall in committee, tried to obtain evidence from some of the witnesses that the bill was not worth the paper it was written on. I have said, and I do not know whether the minister will agree with me, that the present bill is not perfect. I wonder how many ministers of the Crown in the 27 Parliaments before this one felt that they had introduced a perfect bill.

From time to time in our changing society pieces of legislation have to be amended or superseded with new legislation. This bill meets our present situation in encouraging the necessary consultation, the planning and the co-operation with various levels of government and the general public to enable us to proceed toward the important goal we are seeking, which is just within our grasp.

In the recommendations of His Excellency in the preamble to the bill there are what I consider to be three important words—research—planning—co-operation. The feder-