

Canadian Environmental Protection Act

price. Fines of up to \$1 million a day and jail sentences are long overdue.

This is also a very clear signal that we can provide to the people of Canada that we are serious. If one is going to go out and dump toxic wastes into a river system or into our atmosphere, then we will be prepared to lay charges.

● (1140)

There is a number of things that I should mention that the Bill does not do. I have one minute left, so I will mention only one of the major flaws. The Bill fails to incorporate the much demanded environmental bill of rights. The overwhelming majority of Canadians who are concerned about this issue want an environmental bill of rights. It is very clear where we stand on the whole matter of environmental pollution. As a society, we are against it. A comprehensive environmental bill of rights would do just that. As you well know, Mr. Speaker, all we have is a preamble at the beginning of this Bill which goes in that direction. Rather than having a preamble, let us have the development of a comprehensive environmental bill of rights. Every Canadian should have the right to a healthy environment and should not have to be exposed to a polluted environment, whether it is on land, or water, or in the atmosphere.

The Canadian Environmental Protection Act has not done anything on some of the major environmental issues. I refer to the issue of pesticides which is set aside. The Bill does not address acid rain, the issue of the nuclear industry, or the packaging and the treatment of consumer products and the pollution that occurs there. In other words the Bill does not address some of the most critical environmental issues in our country—nuclear energy, acid rain, and the use of pesticides, which is out of control these days. Obviously, this is a very major weakness in the legislation.

In this Bill the Government fails to put a time limit on how long the Government can take to decide if a substance is toxic after it has been put on the priority list. This again is a major failing, because we do not want to take 35 years to determine if a chemical is adversely toxic.

I could go on, but I know there are others who want to say a few words on this critical issue before we vote on it, presumably later in the day. I appreciate this opportunity and look forward to the next debate when we take this legislation and upgrade it in order that when we have a Canadian Environmental Protection Act it is an Act that protects Canadians from a polluted environment.

Mr. Murphy: The Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis) commenced an explanation of why he believed it was important to have an environmental bill of rights. He mentioned that there was only one minute left in his speech and, therefore, he did not have adequate time to expand upon that point. I wonder if in using the time available for questions and comments the Hon. Member could expand upon that and

explain to us why he believes that an environmental bill of rights would be useful in our Canadian context.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis) realizes that I gave him an extra couple of minutes, so if he would wind up I would appreciate it.

Mr. Riis: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, I would be only too pleased to co-operate with your request.

My friend, the Hon. Member for Churchill (Mr. Murphy), has indicated that there is obviously a need for an environmental bill of rights. I do not think there is anyone in the House who would say that that is not a reasonable request or suggestion.

While I indicated at the outset of my comments that Bill C-74 is a minute step in the right direction, it is not a comprehensive piece of legislation. It excludes pesticides, no matter how toxic they are. It excludes nuclear contaminants, no matter how toxic or dangerous they are. Obviously it is not comprehensive legislation. It is actually very narrowly focused. It does not provide any standards of environmental quality. What we have in the legislation are guidelines and objectives, but they are not as strong as the standards that must be met. I feel that we should be setting very specific standards. Therefore, this is again one of the major deficiencies in the legislation.

We all agree that Canadians have the right to a healthy environment. If there is any country in the world that is in a position to provide that, it must be Canada. We are extremely fortunate that in most of Canada the environment is relatively clean. In other parts, unfortunately that is not the case. We ought to focus our efforts not only on cleaning up the waste material and the pollution that exists in certain zones of the country but on taking steps to ensure that this stops and that we simply do not have those types of contaminants in our atmosphere, soils, and water.

There have been repeated demands to the Government to provide the necessary clout to give citizens the right to take polluters to court. For example, citizens on behalf of future generations, on behalf of their children, and on behalf of their neighbours ought to have the opportunity to do that. That is not provided in this legislation. It is only if a person has a direct financial stake that he or she can take the polluter to court.

We can have a very narrow focus that pollution may cause some immediate harm that can be dealt with, but there is not the real understanding that pollution is harmful to everyone. We are all in this together. Pollution in one area will move to another; underground rivers can eventually unite and mix these toxic chemicals and other contaminants. What a person does in one part of Canada might have a profound effect on an individual in another part of the country, to say nothing of the toxic chemicals that are in the atmosphere.