

Non-smokers' Health Act

Bill C-204 received Royal Assent almost a year ago, yet it has never been proclaimed. It has not been enforced. It has never been able to become an act of law because administrators felt that it was unproclaimable until rewritten in a more enforceable framework. Fair enough. We are seeing the results of that effort today.

Earlier this year the Department of Labour, through the initiative of the Minister, entered into discussions with various employers, employee groups, health groups and, I suspect from recent news, tobacco interests and we worked the Non-smokers' Health Act into the version before us today. In the process a few changes were made to the principles involved but essentially preserved the integrity of the Act. Whereas Bill C-204, Lynn McDonald's Bill, gave workers the right to a smoke-free workplace, Bill C-27 before us imposes on employers the responsibility to ensure a smoke-free workplace for their workers. Those and other changes go to show that there is more than one legislative way to skin a cat.

What we know in the context of this legislation is that for more than a generation smoking kills people. I do not think there is any other way to put it. If you smoke excessively, chances are that you will die prematurely and that smoking will cause illnesses that every year lead to the death of many people. The most recent statistics—almost unbelievable—show that 35,000 Canadians die prematurely each year from diseases caused by tobacco smoke and illnesses caused by tobacco smoke.

We have only recently learned that the number of deaths caused by involuntary smoking, breathing the air which contains second-hand smoke, causes deaths as well. Last week the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States reported that environmental tobacco smoke was the greatest source of indoor air pollution in the U.S. Obviously, the same situation would apply to our own country. It is also reported that second-hand smoke was the greatest source of exposure to carcinogens. In other words, second-hand smoke exposed non-smokers to more cancer-causing chemicals than any other aspect in their daily lives. I do not know if you are aware of it, Mr. Speaker, but there are 32,000 chemical agents in tobacco smoke, over 50 have been identified as likely carcinogens.

Health and Welfare has provided us with estimates that 330 Canadians die each year from lung cancers caused by breathing tobacco smoke-contaminated air in the workplace. This means that every year on average 330 Canadians die because people around them smoke. They do not, but the fact that there is smoke in the workplace causes 330 people to die.

We can all be very proud because this Bill, once it passes, will save the lives of at least 330 people every year. Bill C-27 flows out of Private Members' Bill C-204 introduced by Lynn McDonald.

• (1610)

There are a number of items I wish to refer to specifically, and one is the whole idea of a designated smoking room. Under the previous Bill, common carriers would have had to provide a separate room for smokers. Now they need only to set aside a separate area. That is essentially the situation that exists on airlines and buses now, as only a few rows of seats are made smoking seats, but the second-hand smoke still affects non-smoking passengers and employees on common carriers. I have a number of questions I want to put to the Minister on that issue in Committee of the Whole. As a matter of fact, to move this matter expeditiously, I should wait and make those comments and raise those questions during Committee of the Whole stage.

With that, I want to say that it is a delight to participate in this debate. All of us are concerned when we see young people encouraged to smoke by their peers or by advertising. We have taken steps in another way to pull back on those kinds of initiatives. I hope, through this legislation and related legislation, that we can encourage people not to smoke or to stop smoking. We should encourage people to rethink what the tobacco lobby has been successful in encouraging them to think, and that has been to remove some of the impact of the warning on cigarette packages. I think both sides of a cigarette package should simply say that smoking will cause premature death—

Mr. Beatty: It is 20 per cent on both sides.

Mr. Riis: The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Beatty) is indicating that it is already on there, but I would like to see the entire side of a cigarette package taken up with the warning. If people want to find out what brand it is, they can look along the edge of the package.