

Government Organization Act, 1970

There is no question but that the matter of the setting of national standards will be a preoccupation of the minister of the environment and should be a duty and responsibility. As the hon. member pointed out to the House, he has already indicated that this is his intention. However, by incorporating this phraseology in the section, we should, in my view, narrow this field and limit this responsibility. I hope that he will be authorized and, indeed, instructed, to concern himself in the establishment of standards in areas which are purely of local or nonfederal jurisdiction.

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Chairman, I rise to support the amendment of my colleague, the hon. member for Kootenay West. I wish to say at the outset that I disagree with the remarks that the minister has just made. The minister said that setting national standards would limit the area in which this department would be able to work. I think the opposite would be the case. The desired result, I submit, could be brought about in one of two ways. One positive way of achieving standards would be to have the provinces, municipalities and territories of Canada, as a result of consultation and co-operation, agree to uniform national standards for the control of pollution and for the cleaning up of the mess that is prevalent in all parts of our ecology.

Failing that, there is another way of achieving national standards, but it is not as good. If we were unable to obtain a high level of standards after consultation with the provinces, and after all they are all concerned about the matter of pollution control, then it seems to me the federal government should give the country the kind of leadership the country expects. It ought to lay down national standards. I submit that no provincial premier, and no mayor of any municipality in the country, would dare to oppose those standards unless he wished to commit political suicide. I hope that the federal government has the imagination to accept this idea, which would meet the wishes and demands of the public of Canada. The government ought not to allow any of the little premiers or mayors, who act like Arab sheiks more concerned with their little "oildoms" than about their countries as a whole, to frustrate it. Actually, I have heard of no objections to national standards from provinces or municipalities. It seems to me that the demand for them is universal. Any suggestion that the amendment would limit the effectiveness of the federal minister, I think, begs the question. That is negative thinking and ignores the kind of responsibility the national government ought to exercise.

It would probably take about ten years to complete a program involving municipal pollution control. Under that program, every city in Canada, within a ten-year period, ought to be provided with not just primary and secondary sewage treatment facilities, but with tertiary treatment facilities which would recycle the water and provide drinkable water for the population. This program must be implemented from coast to coast. It must not be implemented merely by municipalities able to finance such projects. Neither must that program be undertaken

[Mr. Drury.]

only by provinces capable of undertaking it. There must be provision for all provinces and municipalities to receive some financial assistance. Obviously, pollution policies will be required.

May I, off the top of my head, suggest a formula which could be used. Perhaps the minister of the environment could make available 25 per cent of the cost of a project as a non-repayable grant; another 25 per cent would not be repayable if the work were done within a certain period of time. The remaining costs, if there were any costs to the municipality or province, would be financed by loans bearing interest of 3 per cent, 4 per cent or 5 per cent. I submit that such policies could be undertaken in a more orderly way under a federal authority. Also, the standards established ought to be national. I know of no municipality in Canada that would object, because such a program requires leadership and imagination on the part of the national government. Some municipalities or provinces may impose less stringent controls than others in the field of pollution. This must be stopped. I think that leadership from the federal government is required for those municipalities and provinces which might not live up to national standards.

May I now talk about industrial pollution? The federal authority, it seems to me, must have control in this area in order ensure that the costs of industrial pollution control are not passed on to consumers as price increases. Industrial polluters have profited for decades because they have not been forced to instal anti-pollution equipment which would have been costly. Having made those kinds of profits for a number of decades, I do not see why they should now continue. This would be unfair. I do not see why the law of the land cannot require the people involved to amortize the cost of anti-pollution equipment from profits over a given period of years. If a steel company needs to spend \$50 million or \$60 million on pollution control equipment, it seems to me that the shareholders of that company should take a reduction of 25 cents or 50 cents per share over a five-year period, say, because they were amply rewarded in the years when the corporation was operating without such equipment. It is in these areas that I think the national government ought to exercise some control and direction. The co-operation of all sectors will be needed if we are to cure pollution and prevent it in future.

For too long have too many officials of many governments in this country attempted to hide behind the British North America Act and to use that act as an excuse for not doing something or for avoiding responsibility. Surely, in this age when the Canadian people are mobile, there ought to be some leadership and direction from Ottawa in this area. In all fairness, there should not be limited standards or different standards as between one jurisdiction and other. The citizen of Montreal visiting Regina has just as much right to breathe clean air and drink clean water in Regina as he has in Montreal. He is a citizen of Canada, and the air and water of the country from coast to coast belong to the citizens of Canada.

Mr. Harding: Hear, hear!