

Request for Environmental Council

Mr. Latulippe: Mr. Speaker, I am certainly aware of that, as much as the hon. member is, but that assistance is not yet favourable enough to allow municipalities to resort to it because they are already heavily in debt, which prevents them from incurring new debts. Then other means have to be used to assist those municipalities.

Mr. Pepin: What means?

[*English*]

Mr. Gaétan-J. Serré (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, being concerned, as I am, about pollution I welcome this opportunity to say a few words on the subject. First, I should like to say that the way this motion has been put before us smacks once more of NDP political opportunism. To pretend that the federal government has done nothing in the field of pollution is pure fantasy. During the Throne Speech debate at the beginning of the second session of this twenty-eighth Parliament, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) pledged that the total resources of his government would be brought into play to prevent the advancing menace of pollution in our country. These words have not remained dead. Since then a ministry of the environment had been created to cope with the rising problems and a number of important and extremely effective pieces of anti-pollution legislation have been passed, such as the Canada Water Act, the Motor Vehicle Safety Act, the Territorial Sea and Fishing Zones Act, the Arctic Waters Pollution Act and the Canada Clean Air Act. I could go on and on.

• (2110)

Furthermore, before blaming the federal government for not acting one should remember that the federal government does not have complete jurisdiction in the environmental field. The provinces have a great deal to do in that field, but some are not doing their job. They are reticent indeed to stand up to the big companies with regard to setting up pollution standards and taking legal action against those infringing regulations as to standards. Is the federal government to blame for provincial inaction?

What about municipalities which dump raw sewage in nearby rivers? Of course, mechanisms are already in place, as the hon. member mentioned a while ago, to assist municipalities to build newer and more efficient facilities. However, some are not taking advantage of this. Is the federal government to blame for this inaction?

When I consider the government's realization and the inaction of other levels of government, I cannot help but be surprised at and in disagreement with the motion of the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Harding). I do not mean that I do not care about pollution: on the contrary. I represent an area of Canada which is probably one of the most affected by this problem. Indeed, in Sudbury, "pollution city Canada" as it is often referred to, the damage done by industrial wastes to every aspect of the environment is so obvious and staggering that anyone contemplating a clean-up would hardly know where to start.

For 3,200 square miles around downtown Sudbury, vegetation has been seriously injured or destroyed by

[Mr. Béchard.]

poisonous sulphur-dioxide fumes from the giant Inco and Falconbridge operations. Not only air pollution but water pollution represent a great threat in my area. Much of the Vermillion River watershed in the area has been polluted for years. The nearby resort areas at Massey on the Spanish River are strangled by the stench and waste from a pulp mill at Espanola. Also, many of our beautiful lakes in the area are quickly becoming polluted. Soil pollution is also a major concern. The three million tons of sulphur-dioxide discharged annually has thinned natural vegetation. Because of that the first layer of soil is almost all eroded. In consequence, the area in and around Sudbury looks as though it had been transplanted from the moon. As a matter of fact, the American astronauts came to practise in the Sudbury area last year. As I have said before in this chamber, the situation in the Nickel Belt area has become alarming. The provincial government, which has jurisdiction over mining companies, has been remiss in its duty in not forcing the companies there to take preventive measures long ago.

Heavier fines should be imposed on all polluters. I mean all polluters, not only the mining companies but the municipalities which do not properly dispose of their wastes, and the individual who throws trash on the road or anywhere else. All levels of our society should be penalized if they allow pollution; it is fast becoming a question of life or death.

Measures have recently been taken by the provincial authorities with regard to air pollution in Sudbury. Last year they installed a monitor on Ash Street in Sudbury. What a joke! If the wind happens to blow the smoke that way, which it seldom does, we are told that the pollution index is going up; and if it goes up too much the company will be asked to cut down on its operations. We need more monitors. We need them at least in the four corners of the area. Why are they not there, Mr. Speaker? It is because they know very well that most of the time the index would be beyond the acceptable level.

Although the Sudbury area is badly hit by both air and water pollution, the outskirts and the rest of northern Ontario is still fairly free of contamination. It is still beautiful country. That is why I feel that preventive measures should be taken immediately. I have asked before, and I repeat my plea, that a research and control centre be established in Sudbury at Laurentian University.

An hon. Member: Right away.

Mr. Serré: Yes, tomorrow. Such a centre could carry out research on pollution control, which would assist the companies. It could also co-ordinate the efforts of all levels of government and all interested groups. It would help bring back and keep this vast region of northern Ontario as a tourist paradise and a healthy place for our children.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, a healthy environment concerns the federal, provincial and municipal governments, as well as each individual.

I am happy to have had this opportunity of dealing briefly with this crucial problem which my fellow citizens of the great constituency of Nickel Belt consider to be problem No 1.