

Environmental Affairs

in the legislation we are debating. It seems to me that this partisanship should have been considered many months ago when the basic issue was before the committee and the House. The government should have been pressured at that time to bring in legislation to establish such a council.

• (4:40 p.m.)

There is no doubt that an independent environmental council would be a tremendous asset so far as environmental problems in Canada are concerned, and I disagree with the previous speaker who said that we do not need this type of council. We do need it desperately, for the following reasons. We have the Economic Council of Canada. I know that on many occasions the government has been extremely unhappy with the reports that council has put out to the public. It is supposed to be a council divorced from government, a council that will examine very closely every aspect of the economic activity of this nation and then put them in a report to let Canadians know where, in the opinion of the council, we should be going and where the government is getting off the track.

Just as we have a council in the economic field, we need one in the environmental field. The same type of individual is needed, people who will carry out a close scrutiny of all the problems of pollution of the environment which affect our nation. Then, without any political pressure at all, they would give a report to the Canadian nation which would give us guidance as to where we should be going and what we should be doing, and which would suggest methods of meeting the increasing environmental problems which are causing so much distress not only in Canada but all over the world. I appeal to the government seriously to consider this suggestion in the bill. It is a suggestion that has been made on numerous occasions in the House, namely, to set up a council such as this—because if any nation in the world needs guidance in environmental problems, it is ours.

I should like briefly to point out several fields where I believe we are deficient in dealing with pollution and environmental problems so far as our nation is concerned. We have to a great degree fragmented our approach to the pollution problem. We have divided the authority for pollution problems among a number of departments. It is true that we have set up a co-ordinating committee, but in the past we have found that it has not been working. Too many departments ignore the over-all need for environmental protection, and as a consequence the regulations and laws which were laid down many years ago have not been enforced by the various departments, for a variety of reasons. For example, someone in charge of shipping is faced with a problem dealing with the environment. If the action necessary to deal with the pollution problem would upset the economic aspect of shipping, there is a tendency for the department to forget all about it. The same thing applies to fisheries and forestry, to the mining industry and to other departments. This is why an over-all environmental council is desperately needed. It is needed to give Canada a broad picture of what our environmental problems are, how we should deal with them and what changes we should make interdepartmentally to achieve the goal which, I presume, would be outlined by this council.

I would point out very briefly two or three of the major aspects of the environmental problem which I feel have

[Mr. Harding.]

been almost totally neglected by this government. We talk of dealing with pollution problems and environmental problems in a piecemeal method, yet there is no doubt that there are three factors which we cannot separate. One of them is the development of natural resources. Another is population and pollution. They are intertwined; you cannot separate them. For example, what have we done about population and our urban problems? It has been pointed out by experts in every field that we are getting into more and more trouble so far as urban development is concerned. This is part of the population problem facing our nation. Next to nothing is being done by this government or by any individual in it in this respect. We are not getting the guidance or the direction that is needed. We are just going along, hoping that these problems will solve themselves eventually.

Mr. Corbin: How can you say that?

Mr. Harding: If you do not know that and you are interested in this problem, then I want to tell you that very little has been given to the House in the way of direction to solve these problems.

Mr. Corbin: We have done more than any government in 100 years.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harding: Let me tell the hon. member that more pollution and more environmental problems are facing us than have faced any government in the past 100 years. I have no hesitation in saying that there are all kinds of pollution problems facing us, such as mine effluent flowing into rivers, and nothing is being done to rectify it by the department concerned. I can give the House all kinds of examples. The point I am making is that this council could point out to the government and to the departments concerned that, for example, things are going wrong in the north or in some other section of Canada, and it could suggest changes.

The government is trying to give a false impression to the Canadian people, namely, that we are really driving on all these issues while in reality we are only touching the top and moving very gradually, and not too effectively, in our efforts to clean them up. No one is saying that all these steps should be taken at once.

My friend, the hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka (Mr. Aiken), spoke about national standards. We do not have them in Canada. This should be another objective of the council. We do not want pollution havens in British Columbia, in Newfoundland or in any other province of Canada. Unless we adopt national standards, this will happen. We need an unbiased council to point out these things to the government and to urge governments at the provincial level to get together and prepare a program which would solve most of the jurisdictional and other problems which face us in this field.

I do not want to talk out this bill. As I indicated before, our party is in favour of the principle of setting up an environmental control council. We would like to see it completely divorced from the government, and independent. This is the only way we will get a real alternative to the approaches of the various political parties and the government of the day. We desperately need this, Mr. Speaker.