

*Health and the Environment*

Clause 3(1) of Bill C-25 raises some questions in my mind. I hope hon. members do not think I am being frivolous. It reads:

Where the minister . . .

That is, the Minister of the Environment.

. . . or the Minister of National Health and Welfare suspects that a substance is entering or is likely to enter the environment in a quantity or concentration or under conditions that may constitute a danger to human health or the environment, the minister, or the Minister of National Health and Welfare may (a) collect data . . .

The clause says that these substances are not to be used. The relevant words are "Where the minister . . . suspects that a substance is entering or is likely to enter . . ." What does this mean? What must happen before somebody suspects that something is happening? The former minister of the environment, the Hon. Jack Davis, said in a speech on April 24, 1974, as recorded at page 1730 of *Hansard*:

We need this information urgently because literally hundreds of new chemicals are being introduced into our local environment every year. Some of them should be withdrawn; that is after the event. But many others can be intercepted in the future; that is ahead of the event. It is the ahead of the event operation which our new Environmental Contaminants Act is all about.

I and many of my colleagues on this side of the House want to support the alleged principle of this bill, but we cannot support it as there is a hole in it big enough to drive a truck through. The defects in the bill makes it almost impossible for the government to know what are the 50, 100 or more substances that are being produced each year, and the government can only act if it suspects that a substance is likely to harm the environment. Only then can it investigate. That is my point. How can you call this a preventive act? I see the hon. member across the way chuckling about this. What is there to laugh about? Would people in Japan laugh, people who were poisoned by industrial processes that went on for years because nobody checked out the processes in advance? I know the minister does not consider this a laughing matter and I am sorry the hon. member on the other side thinks it is something to laugh about.

If this bill is to be preventive, then in the name of heaven why not include a provision requiring manufacturers to file information on which the government can base its considerations? The government agency would then be in a position to suspect that a particular substance is harmful to the environment. I recognize clearly that such a provision would impose upon industry; however, let me quote what the Minister of the Environment said about the bill on November 29, as recorded at page 1815 of *Hansard*:

I must give credit to the manufacturers who already provided information to the department on the nature of new substances they intended to introduce on the market. They are already co-operating because they realize that prevention is indeed better than cure.

Apparently some manufacturers are already co-operating, although I do not know under what procedural system. I am sure manufacturers are prepared to co-operate, and apparently some of them are already telling the government what substances they are producing. But unless the government knows what to look for as such substances are produced, unless it knows what substances to suspect, countless substances may find their way into our environment without the government knowing about

them until after they are in the environment—until after the fact. That is my point: it is not difficult to grasp.

Nobody is perfect. I see my hon. friend across the way smiling again. I have never suggested the government is perfect. I am not criticizing it for not being perfect. However, on April 24 the then minister of the environment uttered these comfortable words to the people of Canada about this measure, as recorded at page 1728 of *Hansard*:

It will ensure that man-made substances will be checked out thoroughly before they are produced in this country and sold to an unsuspecting public.

That just is not so. No doubt that is intended, but it will not happen under this bill. He went on to say:

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The idea is that artificial or unnatural substances should be spotted well ahead of time. They should not be sold in large numbers or vast quantities and broadcast around the country before we know what their environmental effects are likely to be. They should be checked over carefully before they are scattered around and before the cost of recovery and recycling gets out of hand.

I am in absolute accord with that statement. Everyone in this House ought to be. However, that will not happen under this act. Under this act there will be no checking on substances until something happens that makes the minister or ministers suspect that something is wrong. Referring to Bill C-3, which was fundamentally the same measure, the former minister went on to say on April 24, 1974:

Bill C-3 is designed to stop pollution before it starts. Our new Environmental Contaminants Act will put us into the business of prevention rather than cure.

It is not the fault of the present minister that those words were said. However, my answer to that is, in the absence of fundamental changes between the former Bill C-3 and the present Bill C-25 that statement is a lot of hogwash. It is time the Canadian people realized that it is all very well to put out press releases about a piece of environmental legislation, and to put out comfortable words about prevention before the fact; however, when the substance of the legislation does not give you that, what you are doing is deluding the public of Canada. In the long run, you are fooling yourself. I do not see any reason why tonight hon. members should be fooled.

The minister might not like what I am saying. She should look at the act and read it herself. Do not take my word for it. If there is any difficulty with the legal language, take it to the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) who is in the House tonight. I am very happy to see him here. I see he is paying close attention to what I am saying: I am very comforted by that. There is no question that the intent of the government in putting forward this bill is very laudatory. I suspect that it was very apparent to the Department of the Environment that there was a hole in the entire framework of environmental legislation in this country.

Along with many others, I have had a modest part to play in promoting some of the legislation that we have in this country on environmental matters. I commend all those who were involved in recognizing this problem and in bringing forward a bill to do something about it. However, what cannot be tolerated in a matter as grave as this is pretending to oneself or to anyone else that a fundamental defect in the bill will support one's intent. Let me

[Mr. Fraser.]