

Adjournment Debate

Prime Minister, as head of the government, would have the final say on what is happening. No wonder when I first raised the issue the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and their back bench noisemakers seemed nervous. Needless to say, I find this quite disturbing. It is time for clarification and leadership on this matter.

Setting aside the red herring issues whereby local arrangements between communities on two sides of the border share a singly developed local supply and the export of bottled water and other such products which incorporate water, such as wines and whiskies, Canada's waters should not now or ever be for sale.

It has frequently been claimed by those who see water export as a great economic opportunity that Canada has so much water and uses so little. Why not determine the obvious surplus, they say, and sell it for good hard cash? This suggestion was directed to the Prime Minister earlier today, and he concurred in it. That is amazing. I wonder how members of the cabinet can accept that position.

Newspaper accounts often credit this country with 25 per cent, some say even 40 per cent, of the world's fresh water resources. Such estimates are not merely misleading, they are inaccurate. Most of the world's water not found in the oceans or locked up in polar ice and glaciers is stored underground. Canada's over-all groundwater situation is not known with any degree of reliability, but what we do know is not especially promising. Too many of our northern lands are bared of soil, impregnated with permafrost and underlain with impermeable crystalline rock or saline formations to make probable much groundwater potential or to create great expectations, other than on a local scale. Where Canada does excel is in its lake area, which is perhaps greater than that of any other country in the world. Lakes are invaluable for regulating the flow of rivers to the sea, but ours are, for the most part, the legacy of an ice age which ended several thousands of years ago. Lakes are not renewable except at a cost to the rivers which fill and drain them.

The only real measure of a country's water supply, therefore, is its renewable streamflow. On an average annual basis, Canada's rivers discharge not 40 per cent, not 25 per cent, but slightly less than 9 per cent of the world's renewable water supply, roughly 3.5 million cubic feet per second. Set against a Canadian population which is less than 1 per cent of the world's population, this is a generous endowment indeed; set against a territorial area which is about 7 per cent of the world's land mass, however, it is not so disproportionate. Also, this national data must be tempered with the knowledge that it disguises wide variations of water availability in time and place. Much of the Canadian west is not well-watered. Indeed, almost two thirds of our runoff is carried northward into the Arctic ocean.

On the demand side, there are similar misconceptions. A conventional determination of future water demand in Canada, the rest to be considered surplus, might add up projections of present uses for domestic, industrial, irrigation, electrical and recreational purposes in terms of discrete quantities. In the wider scheme of things, Canada's water must emerge as more than a commodity to be harvested, processed and transported like a bushel of

[Mr. Wenman.]

wheat or a barrel of oil. It is an integral element of our environment. It is, therefore, basic to our national identity, to our understanding of what this country is all about.

It is crystal clear that water export has no place in that future. Our priorities and our opportunities in water management are here within our national and provincial boundaries. We will face enough challenge when dealing with the ramifications of major water projects for Canadians, without exaggerating these for the convenience of others.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret I have to interrupt the hon. member but his time has expired.

Mr. Wenman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If you take into account the two or three minutes to make the changeover to adjourn parliament, I believe I have another minute left.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. No point of order can be raised at this stage of the proceedings. The hon. member knows the Chair tries to be fair and just at all times.

Mr. Len Marchand (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, on October 18 the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Wenman) made reference not to one concern, but three. Let me speak to each of these concerns in turn.

With regard to water export, the Minister of the Environment (Mrs. Sauvé) clearly stated in response to the hon. member that she is not in favour of water export and that no discussions have been held with the United States to that effect. Nor has the United States government ever proposed that we consider exporting our water.

However, let us be very clear what is meant by the term "water export". The artificial diversion out of this country of waters which are entirely Canadian would, of course, be water export. This in fact, has never occurred. For emphasis, Canada's water is simply not for sale. When the hon. member speaks of Skagit, Garrison and so on, he must realize that these are boundary and transboundary waters which are the joint responsibility of the government and transboundary waters which are the joint responsibility of the governments of the United States of America and Canada. In their natural state, they cross or form the boundary between our two countries and do not solely lie within the jurisdiction of either country. Thus, the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 provides the instrument which governs the actions which can be taken by either country. Through the Department of External Affairs, discussions have been initiated and will continue to be initiated with the United States concerning these and other boundary and transboundary water issues to ensure that Canadian rights are always protected.

The third concern the hon. member expressed interest in was the federal role in water management on both the international and federal-provincial fronts. Examples of actions taken on the international front include the legislated protection of our Arctic waters in 1970, followed by our continued efforts for global agreement at the Law of the Sea Conference on regulations controlling offshore and oceanic pollution. After probably the most intensive