

Supply

● (1250)

I seem to recall that the Minister was an advocate of that very method, which was to dig it up, take it away and put it into containment areas until such time as technology catches up. We will then be able to dispose of it satisfactorially, neutralize it or do whatever one must do with it. That was the position of the Minister. Unfortunately, it no longer seems to be the position which we are advancing in the discussions. It is certainly not the position I hear coming across.

If I am not mistaken we now hear Mr. Thomas and the U.S. administration suggesting that they have come up with a new way. We will all get straws and suck it up. At least, that seems to be what they are proposing. The suggestion seems to be that somehow over the next 20 years we will find a magic, innovative way, yet to be discovered, to suck this stuff out of the ground. And to do what with it? I am not absolutely sure. However, it is a wonderful suggestion. How long will it take? It appears that the process which Mr. Thomas has yet to bring forward as a workable and practical means of dealing with the problem will take many, many years. In fact, it has been suggested that it will take a period of between 30 and 50 years before all of these pollutants can finally be gotten out of the—God knows how many perhaps 80—dump sites, large and small, which exist along the U.S. side of the Niagara River. In the meantime we must hope that it does not keep leaking. That seems to be the answer. However, if it leaks in the meantime we will just have to hope that no one takes sick as a result of it.

I think people across the country have to understand that what we are talking about is a river which contributes 83 per cent of the tributary flow into Lake Ontario. In fact, the river itself almost totally determines the environmental health of Lake Ontario, which is a source of drinking water for nearly four million Canadians.

Mr. Caccia: And nearly one million Americans.

Mr. Deans: We are not talking about the drinking water from some tiny lake which if closed off for human consumption purposes as a result of its waters being unfit for drinking could be replaced with some other source. Since the early part of the 1970s we have seen the detection of a wide variety—and I could list them—of chemicals, some in low and some in much larger concentrations, flowing into this river and subsequently into Lake Ontario.

While I was mentioning the four million Canadians who drink this water and who rely upon it as their sole source of drinking water, the Hon. Member for Davenport said that there are an additional 1.5 million people, I believe, who use Lake Ontario as their primary source of drinking water. The Niagara River problem and the pollution in it is one which has been with us, I suspect, for as long as the river has been there. However, the detection of major problems started back in about the late part of the 1940s—if I recall correctly it was in 1948—when the International Joint Commission issued a report on the sewage, bacteria, chloride, phenyl and other substances which existed in the river and, therefore, within the

lake. From 1948 to date there has been report after report showing the deterioration of the lake, the deterioration of the fish, and the deterioration in the quality of all aspects of that body of water.

In 1974 the Department of the Environment reported widespread contamination in terms of mirex and PCBs in fish, in gulls and in gull eggs as determined by the Herring Gull Egg Monitoring Program, in Lake Ontario. In 1976 the Great Lakes Water Quality Board compiled a list of over 400 chemicals, some of them natural and some of them man-made—chemicals nonetheless—which were in the water, sediment and fish in the Niagara River.

In 1978 the same IJC, the same water quality board, reported 38 new toxic chemicals found in the Great Lakes environment, again including dioxin in fish. In 1980 the Canada-Ontario Review Board of the Niagara River Environmental Baseline Report reported high levels of toxic chemicals in the lower portions of the Niagara River, the part leading into Lake Ontario, and when compared to what was found at the opposite end, the in-flow from Lake Erie, in 1980, there was a report of elevated dioxin levels.

In 1981 there was a special report on pollution in the Niagara River and then there was the creation of the Canada-U.S. Niagara River Toxics Committee. I think at that point a great many of us breathed, if not a sigh of relief then at least a sigh of hope. It appeared that after numerous reports going all the way back to 1948 we had a group which was committed to doing something.

In 1983 the Canada-U.S. Water Quality Board reported that there were decreasing concentration trends for certain of the chemicals. I would say that was as a result of the vigilance of environmentalists; the Government of Ontario and the federal Government of the day had begun to identify the outflows which were occurring, where they were and what was causing them. I also pay recognition to the efforts being made as the result of certain of the manufacturers beginning to recognize their responsibilities. People were beginning to show some conscience with regard to the effect that that was having, and little by little we now start to back the problem up. However, I am afraid it is not being done quickly enough. Then, the Niagara River Toxics Committee released its report in 1984, something which my colleague who spoke before me dealt with.

I do not think there is any doubt as to what the problem is. The Niagara River continues to be a cesspool. It continues to feed into Lake Ontario. There are many along that river who do not give one hoot about what they are doing to the quality of the drinking water because they do not have to drink it. There are others who pay lip service to their concerns without being prepared to take the type of appropriate action. I wish to say to the Minister that among those is the administration within the U.S. itself which, for years, has fought tooth and nail against committing substantial sums of money to the clean-up. This is something the Minister knows. I am not telling him something he does not know. The former Minister