

Fisheries

That means that we could ask a court to order a plant that pollutes to close down.

The threat of closure, however, works both ways: A company can say, "Look, pollution control equipment is expensive: We can't afford to clean this place up completely. If you keep pestering us, we'll close down the mill and the closure could destroy this community". In that way, a company owner may refuse almost entirely to co-operate. Or, at the other end of the spectrum, officials may have talked to a plant owner about cleaning up his operation and he is proceeding with reasonable speed. We believe in his good faith. A citizen's group, however, is taking, or can take, him to court under the general provision prohibiting the deposit of deleterious substances, and could bring about the immediate shutdown of a big employer who is doing his best to clean up his operation.

Most cases, obviously, fall between such extremes. Nevertheless, the unwieldy nature of the act at present has handicapped our anti-pollution work. We are unable to make the regulations fit the circumstances as they should. The act contains no specific authority to make regulations for specific types of existing plants on an industry by industry basis. The environmental protection agency of the United States, on the other hand, has such authority. We need it, too: it is a practical way to solve pollution problems.

The amendments we ask would give us more flexibility in our approach to polluters. We need authority to demand specific improvements in specific situations, for individual industries and individual plants. We need authority to let a plant owner keep depositing pollutants in regulated amounts provided he is working toward a cleaner operation. We need bigger fines, up to \$100,000 for wilful polluters who refuse to co-operate with clean-up regulations. The new powers, if this House approves them, will let us push the plants along at a reasonable and realistic rate in the clean-up of their operations without driving them out of business.

Many of these industrial plants discharging noxious wastes are old. Companies built them when we thought nature could dispose of whatever we threw at it. Now we know better. What we put into the water can change it. We can destroy the natural environment. Our dependence on nature has become a dependence on our governance of nature.

As in most issues, the course of reason is the middle way. We find extremists on both sides of these issues. We also find moderates; and the moderates usually represent what turns out to be the common interest and, more frequently, common sense. Some extremists would close down any industry which emits an effluent regardless of the environmental needs, regardless of what pollution control technology may have done to reduce the threat. They turn a blind eye to economic or social consequences. Fortunately, most environmentalists are not unreasonable. They want, quite simply, a cleaner and healthier environment. They do not want our life support systems sacrificed for temporary industrial gain.

There are extremists on the industrial side, too—people who refuse to accept the environmental realities, people who see every move to forestall degradation as a pretext by government

to control them out of existence. But here, too, we are talking about a minority. The majority of industry's representatives that I have met see the need for changes; they recognize that new problems call for new solutions, that what the public asks of them is not only reasonable and necessary but is economically and technologically possible. To sum it up, the reasonable approach is one that recognizes that the quality of the human environment has economic and ecological elements. The answer lies in balance.

I want to go on record now as saying that I will continue to listen to the voices of reason, but that I have little time for extremists from either side. I will strive, through these amendments, to see the provisions of the Fisheries Act consistently applied, and I am confident that these very necessary amendments will be applied in the spirit of reasonableness which has characterized Canadian environmental progress over the past decade or so. Growth must respect the environment. In the past, where society has grown, fish have tended to die. If we can save them a place to live, the changes are better for us. We have made of progress a god. But mercury was named for the messenger of the gods, and mercury has warned us clearly that the gods of progress have a darker side.

I am sure all hon. members here believe in some growth and change, but we all draw the line about someone changing, without our consent, the water or other elements that support the life of the fish or of ourselves. The fish and their waters are a public resource. With the changes to the Fisheries Act that I am asking for, my department will be better able to carry out the public responsibility of guarding them. I commend, Mr. Speaker, these amendments to the House. I hope hon. members will support them, and, where committee discussions so warrant, that together we can improve even more Bill C-38.

● (1540)

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (South Shore): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on this measure. This bill deals with pollution, power problems, penalties, poachers, police officers, protection, politics and prohibition.

I want to thank the minister for his statement. I listened to him with interest. I want to welcome him back to the House from his visit to Cuba, even though he was there such a brief period that he does not come back to us with a typical Cuban suntan or even his pockets bulging with cigars. Hopefully, at an early date the minister will find time either to give the House or the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry an outline of what he discussed in Cuba or an outline of what the Cuban government plan to do in its fishing operations off the Atlantic coast of Canada.

Bill C-38 is indicative of the Liberal government's fishery policy—laced with good intentions but brought in too late. Is it any wonder that back home fishermen look at me with a twinkle in their eyes and call the minister the Rip Van Winkle of the fishing industry?

There is absolutely no excuse for this bill, which was introduced on February 21, 1977, to have been delayed until now for second reading. The fishermen, the Progressive Con-