

Environmental Affairs

On May 31, 1985, the same Minister committed the federal Government to playing a lead role in the development of options for the destruction of PCBs at the national level. Since that time we have not heard a word about it.

In October, 1985, Lee Thomas came to Ottawa with some kind of plan for the clean-up of the Niagara River. There was no statement by the Minister at the time. The report itself was kept under wraps in Ottawa, while it was released for public consumption and debate south of the border.

In December, 1985, the Royal Society of Canada and its U.S. counterpart produced a substantial report on the pervasive presence of toxic chemicals in the Great Lakes. Again there was no government response nor action to follow up on this important work.

From November, 1985 to March, 1986 there was the St. Clair River saga, a monument to the Minister of the Environment and his grandstanding, indecisiveness, and fear of being contradicted by his own departmental officials. He belittled his departmental scientists. He distanced himself from them. When he could not cope with the real facts of life, he declared that the whole mess was a provincial matter.

In May, 1986, the Minister of the Environment went again to Washington, nearly a year from the day his predecessor promised a speedy and comprehensive plan to clean up the Niagara River. Not only did he return, pretending that he had made a great achievement, but he returned without any consideration having been given to excavation and destruction of toxic chemicals, to which the Minister claimed to be formally committed when it suited the occasion.

I should like to refer to the most serious part of the developments in May of this year. As a negotiator, the Minister gave away a disagreement between himself and the Ontario Minister of the Environment, thus letting Washington clearly understand that insofar as the U.S. position was concerned, it could drive a wedge between Ottawa and Toronto and settle for the lower of the two positions, namely, the position of the Government of Canada, unfortunately.

This sequence of activities confirms the sad conclusion that the Government is strong on promises and very shaky on delivery. Until now we have not seen any results which are worth speaking or writing home about. The Minister's actions last May actually resulted in a delay of another year. There was not a single ounce of reduction in toxic waste. However, he managed to describe the event as a step forward. The press release which he issued at that time listed accomplishments in the same manner as his predecessor listed them a year before, namely, a recognition of the problem as being serious and the need for a plan of action with timetables and targets.

The Minister has been treading water for a year on the Niagara River issue. Because of his eagerness to be friends with Washington, he will continue to tread water for another year. We still have not seen the agreement which was signed by the Minister of the Environment in Washington on May 14, 1986. Meanwhile, the health of some five million Canadians

continues to be at risk. The Government has shown an inability to do anything about it.

Part of the motion before the House this evening deals with the lack of response of the Government to the pressing need for an upgrading of waste water treatment facilities, a matter which is of serious importance particularly in the Great Lakes and in the St. Clair River. We in the Opposition cannot understand why the Government is not introducing policies to deal with these particular problems. It should be assisting with the installation of updated and environmentally friendly technology, strong on the prevention side, at industrial plants. Such a program would help the companies do exactly that. It should assist also with the installation of sewers which would separate contaminated from clean water and would ensure that the water is only discharged after proper treatment. It should assist with the replacement of current mechanical monitoring techniques, which belong to ancient times, with computerized technology.

The more we look at the record of the Government over the past 21 months, the more we see a series of promises which are not backed up by substantial, tangible results. It is time for the Government to account for itself in environmental matters related to toxic chemicals.

I am anxious to hear what the Parliamentary Secretary has to say in defence of what looks like not just a shaky record but a real sham.

● (1810)

Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia), the Liberal critic for the Environment, suffers most of all from inaccuracy. He has a great deal of selective reporting, selective amnesia and really a regrettable attitude in understanding what is really going on. The more he gets away from any real responsibility and any real information, the worse his speeches become.

Over \$700 million in expenditures and over 10,000 people in Environment Canada are, for the first time since 1979, led by a Minister who is able to understand the problem and to deal with the real issues.

Mr. Caccia: He didn't begin in 1979.

Mr. Gurbin: I am going to give specifics—

Mr. Caccia: It is high time you did.

Mr. Gurbin: —that will identify the selective discrepancy in the comments made by the Liberal critic for the Environment. The Member talks about research into a number of areas relating to toxicology. One of the very first things this Government did was to make a long-term commitment, the kind of commitment necessary in research, to acid rain. Eighteen million dollars a year for five years is guaranteed. It is on the table, it is a commitment of the Government and it has been for over a year now. Second, we set up the wildlife