

Adjournment Debate

democracy and one which I would be hesitant to see withdrawn in the case of the Upper House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please. The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business is now expired. Pursuant to Standing Order 42(1) the Order is dropped from the Order Paper.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[*English*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 66 deemed to have been moved.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS—PRESENCE OF DIOXINS IN MIRAMICHI RIVER—GOVERNMENT POSITION/REQUEST FOR ASSURANCE ADEQUATE MEASURES WILL BE TAKEN

Ms. Lynn McDonald (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I am raising today an issue of very serious concern of environmental pollution in the Miramichi River area at the Domtar plant near Newcastle in New Brunswick, a situation I have raised in the House a couple of times without receiving any kind of a satisfactory answer.

We now know that the provincial Minister of the Environment for New Brunswick, the Hon. Vaughn Blaney, has decided not to allow the reopening of the plant in question, Domtar, which had requested permission to reopen in order to fulfil a contract given by the federal Government through the Canadian International Development Agency. This is a plant that had been known to be polluting in the area for a very long time.

• (1800)

There is a whole history that would take hours to read into the record. There were concerns of residents in the area regarding water, animals, and the long term cover-up on the part of environmental officials who were aware of the dangers created by toxins in the area, particularly pentachlorophenol, a substance used in the coating of wooden telephone poles. There is a very long history of this substance which is presently under review. It should not be used in any form in Canada. It is a substance which has been banned in other countries, notably in Sweden.

When I first raised the question, I received the answer from the Minister of the Environment (Mr. McMillan) that we were working with the company and that clean-up was going ahead. He then retracted that statement somewhat and said that the Government of Canada is riding herd on the company. We know that the Government has not been riding herd on the company. We know that previous Governments had not been riding herd on the company. Instead the files have accumulated showing disastrous results for residents and for workers in

an area where workers in the same plant have died mysteriously early of diseases related to chemicals.

In 1969 the fisheries department wrote Domtar to say that the water was exceedingly toxic. In 1974 there was an internal memo at Environment Canada documenting the fact that the situation had been under review for five years, that the water was still toxic, and that the company was doing nothing.

In 1981 Environment Canada published a report that looked at dioxins around the plant and recommended that dioxin levels be determined in the water and sediments of the Miramichi River in the vicinity. This was never done. Terrestrial and aquatic plants growing in contaminated areas should be analysed to evaluate the dioxins. This was never done. A further recommendation that ground water be sampled to determine migration of dioxins was only done in 1987, and the results were only released last year. The testing was done by the company, a company obviously with an interest at stake. Environment Canada has done nothing here.

In 1984 Environment Canada performed more tests and found levels of two orders of magnitude higher of octa-dioxins, and background concentrations of dioxins were also found.

In 1988 Environment Canada held meetings with Domtar. Domtar informed Environment Canada of its studies into migrations of contaminants and plans for clean-up. However, requirements for the clean-up specifically have never been approved. Then we have the Government of Canada giving a contract to Domtar in order to go back into operation in an area in which they have not cleaned up the pollution in the first place.

Previous Governments—in the case of the federal Government, previous Liberal Governments; in the case of the provincial Government of New Brunswick, previous Conservative Governments—did not act at the time. We wonder if perhaps there had been action in time that jobs would not have been lost, residents would have been safe, the ground water question would have been looked at. We do not know if there were dioxins in the drinking water that people were drinking. The tests date back only to 1987. We do not know the quality of the water that people were drinking for all those years in the 1970s and early 1980s. If something had been done in time, it is possible that we would still have jobs there. The question, should we be sacrificing jobs for the environment and the environment for jobs, would not have come up.

Certainly, the right decision has now been made by the Minister of the Environment for New Brunswick. I congratulate him on making a tough decision. We cannot sacrifice the environment for immediate jobs. We know that the long term result of making that type of decision is loss of jobs, because it means even more serious problems. It means dioxins in fish, an impact on agriculture, and all of that means loss of jobs.