

Clean Air Act

Air has always seemed to be a limitless resource. We thought we could go on pouring pollutants into it. It was only as we began to understand the extent of global air pollution that we recognized air is a commodity which depends on delicate recycling mechanisms, and which can be subject to destruction. Air pollution is not a new problem. Smoke from coal fires in the larger cities in England caused so much trouble in the fourteenth century that laws were passed providing the death penalty for those responsible. Even then, they knew that the health of city residents was being threatened. As we moved through the centuries down to the present time, we have banished a lot of particle pollutants from the air. No longer does dense smoke pour out of coal burning factories. But now we have the problem of noxious fumes getting into the atmosphere, sulphur dioxide from various types of factories, all of which cause problems for people who live in urban areas.

There are many problems associated with pollution. It is becoming abundantly clear that as the standard of living increases in Canada, the United States and other countries, our chance of polluting the atmosphere, and our water and soil, increases. That is why there is such urgent need for us to set strict controls if we are to solve the problem. I would like to make reference again to something I have raised on a number of occasions in this House. It is that one cannot tackle pollution by itself. There are several other factors that must come into our over-all attack on pollution. One is population. I am not thinking just in terms of holding the world population at a stable level, although I think something must be done quickly along that line, but there are other aspects of population growth that must be examined. This should be part of the over-all problem to be examined by the department of the environment.

What are we going to do about the urban areas? What are we going to do about existing industries? Are we going to disperse some of them to other parts of Canada? Are we going to allow industry to grow in cities? It has been estimated that within a very short period of time Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver will contain half the population of our country. Government departments must start over-all resource and population planning if we are to solve some of the key pollution problems facing us today. The same type of planning must take place in other nations. The planning must be international, but there is no sign of it appearing. One or two departments are examining urban problems, but there is no over-all planning taking place.

There is also the matter of resource development pollution and the recycling process. As I have said on numerous occasions, Mr. Speaker, we are one of the most wasteful nations in the world. We should be recycling many of the products that we use instead of throwing them away, causing pollution from one end of the country to the other. More research should be undertaken into recycling processes. I have already mentioned the automobile. According to statistics, 60 per cent of the total air pollution on the North American continent comes from the automobile. I do not know what the

[Mr. Harding.]

percentage is in Canada. It might be higher than that in some cities. We cannot have effective national standards unless all pollutants are covered.

I join the hon. member for South Western Nova (Mr. Comeau) in criticizing the government for bringing this bill forward at this time. We have had copies of it for just about nine or ten days. I sent copies of it to some 20 or 30 individuals and organizations who would like to assist in getting better legislation for the people of Canada, and with one or two exceptions I have not yet had replies from them.

Mr. Davis: Why not become a member of the committee?

Mr. Harding: I did not hear the minister's comment, but if he referred to work in committee, yes we can do a lot of work in the committee. But there are many organizations which cannot afford to send representatives to Ottawa. There are many individuals with expertise in air pollution problems who must express their views through their Members of Parliament. This is called participatory democracy, and that is the reason I regret we did not have an extra four or five days in which to get some consensus from such people.

• (2:50 p.m.)

May I now talk about the bill itself, Mr. Speaker? I said, initially, that it is a step forward. Our party has every intention in the world of backing the legislation. When it comes before the committee we shall attempt to move amendments to those clauses that we feel are weak. We shall suggest amendments to the minister which we hope will strengthen the bill or insert provisions which we feel are missing. Of course, we hope that our amendments will be accepted. I believe that every Canadian has the right to breathe clean air, to drink water and to live in a clean environment. I believe that those rights should be specified in the constitution. Canadians should have the right to live in a clean environment. The clean environment ought to be guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. I think that the Bill of Rights will need to be amended one day, to provide for this additional right.

As I pointed out, this bill is aimed primarily at stationary sources of pollution. They are mentioned in the bill. In his talk the minister said that this part of the bill would be applied widely. This is what worries me most of all. Here, again, there is a lack of a single, uniform and united approach to air pollution problems and, as sure as fate, Mr. Speaker, we will run into the same sort of problems with this bill as we ran into with the bill dealing with water pollution in Canada. On our statute books there are dozens of statutes dealing with pollution. In this country there are regulations of all kinds on this subject. Scarcely any department of government is unaffected by laws or regulations aimed at stopping pollution.

I have said previously on the floor of the House and I will say again now that, although there are all kinds of statutes and regulations which are designed to deal with pollution, those laws have been ignored for years, and