

Dumping at Sea

change substantially our approach to the whole question of the priority of the environment. We will have to assign that concern a priority which so far has not been assigned it by the government.

It is not enough just to have a bill or a convention. If we are serious about this we will have to engage in the development of new methods. We must be prepared to sponsor new research. We must take steps which will make it possible for Canada to act effectively on a day-to-day basis in dealing with problems which might arise because of the loopholes in this agreement or because of accidents that might occur.

Earlier in the discussion tonight one of my colleagues raised the very germane question of the progress of discussions now under way concerning the international Law of the Sea. It is abundantly clear from what I have been able to see in a brief discussion of this bill that this bill, as it stands, provides no protection unless it is backed up by a strengthening of the state of the international Law of the Sea.

The bill allows loopholes concerning cargoes loaded outside Canada, ships of foreign registry, leakages that might be construed not to have been deliberate, and actions about which the minister may have decided, for whatever reason, not to exercise a discretion.

There are all sorts of possibilities for pollution to occur despite this piece of paper we are discussing here this evening. One of the most important safeguards we can develop, and of which this bill can be a part, is to continue, and give greater importance to, the process now under way in Geneva to strengthen the international Law of the Sea.

In this matter, and in many others which involve Canada's relations with other countries, what we do in this parliament is only a very small part of the job. It is only a very small part of our protection. It will turn out to have been in vain unless we can establish some international mechanism to ensure adherence to the standards which we might set out in statute, or the standards which might flow from an international convention respecting ocean dumping.

I have raised some of the concerns that I, and my colleagues in the official opposition, have about this bill. I reiterate that we share the concern of the government that Canada have the opportunity to be one of the signatory nations in the bringing into force of this convention. However, I repeat the caveat I uttered earlier. Unless we are given adequate answers to some of the questions we raised, unless there is some assurance the loopholes we are dealing with are going to be closed or narrowed, and unless there is some assurance that we are engaged in something more than a gesture, we will hold up the bill in committee until we get a good bill. We are not going to pass a bad bill simply so Canada can be a party to the signing of an international convention.

We share the concern of the government, the minister and the parliamentary secretary regarding the importance of this legislation. We regret that it was not brought in earlier. We on this side of the House were told for some time that this was a matter of priority to the government, yet it is only now under extraordinary circumstances that

[Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain).]

the government has introduced it. We are prepared to overlook the gap between the priority it claims and the priority it displays. However, we are not prepared to overlook the gaps which exist in this legislation and which could cause problems and thereby render our work here and in committee useless.

In closing I simply repeat that we agree with the motives of the bill. We have some concern about the particulars of it. It is a bill which we feel unhappily reflects the generally junior status of the Department of the Environment in the government. This bill will only be effective in the final analysis when Canada and Canadians can play an important role in causing other nations of the world to develop a stronger body of international law.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Marchand) will realize that the facetious comment I interjected in the first two or three minutes of his speech, which was made in the spirit of the proceedings of the House at that moment, did not represent either my view or the view of this party with respect to Bill C-37.

The fact is that we regard this as a serious and very important piece of legislation. We would like to see it get second reading within a reasonable period of time so that it can be sent to the standing committee for the thorough study it will have to be given there. After all, it takes only a cursory glance at the 25 pages of the bill to realize that it is a highly technical piece of legislation. It is the sort of bill that can best be examined in a committee where, in addition to the members themselves being present, there can be the officials who can advise on the terms of this legislation.

● (2110)

I would like to say that in my view and in the view of this party every step we take, even if it is not the giant step we would like to see taken, in the direction of doing something about pollution anywhere, is important and should be supported.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I like the words, poetic though they were, with which the hon. member completed his speech. He said the sea was the heritage of all of us. That is true, and steps should be taken to make sure it is protected. This goes for the sea, for our own inland waters, and for the air above and around us. We are really just getting started on the whole business of controlling pollution. Future generations are looking to us to take all the steps we can to protect our environment, and there is no time to lose.

I gather from statements made by members of the official opposition that they will probably complain that the bill does not go far enough. And then, within minutes, they are likely to complain that it goes too far.

An hon. Member: That always happens!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hon. members opposite appear to be in good spirits tonight. That pleases me very much. I agree that further steps will have to be