

In the family court area, we have taken certain steps in the provinces to make progress even before making final changes. We have endorsed the concept of certain pilot projects in relation to family law, and throughout the country a number of interesting experiments are being conducted as a result of proposals made in the working papers of the Law Reform Commission. I want to emphasize that these are working papers, Mr. Speaker.

I agree with the hon. member for Greenwood that it is important that we move with dispatch when we receive the final recommendations of the Law Reform Commission. The government cannot in every case, nor can the House, accept blindly or automatically the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission as though they were the law-making body in place of this House. It will be our resolve, however, to put before the House as quickly as we can recommendations based upon or related to the submissions they make. I say to the hon. member that he may be premature in his criticism, but to the extent that he wants to light fires I am glad to have them lit. We will attempt to show, by material placed before this House on many areas of the law, that we can act rapidly once we have the official reports of the Law Reform Commission.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

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ENVIRONMENTAL CONTAMINANTS ACT

MEASURES TO PROTECT HUMAN HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT FROM CONTAMINANTS

The House resumed, from Friday, November 29, consideration of the motion of Mr. Sharp (for the Minister of the Environment) that Bill C-25, to protect human health and the environment from substances that contaminate the environment, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry.

Mr. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, in rising tonight to respond, on behalf of my party, to the bill that the Minister of the Environment (Mrs. Sauvé) has introduced, I should like to say how pleased I am that the minister is in the House. I say to the minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, that when I raised the question of her not being in the House when the second reading debate commenced, I only did so because I felt it was important that the minister be here. I recognize that at that time the hon. lady was on official duty in another part of the country. I think I speak for all members when I say how pleased I am that the Minister of the Environment is with us this evening: we appreciate that.

Health and the Environment

I think I should also say, out of courtesy to my hon. friend the parliamentary secretary, that when I raised this demur some days ago, in no sense did I raise it with the suggestion that it was in any way improper for the parliamentary secretary to begin the debate on the bill. I only mentioned it because I thought it was important that the Minister of the Environment be present during the debate.

I say it is important that the minister be here tonight, because while my colleagues and I respect parts of this bill we have grave doubts about whether it will even begin to do what the government has said it will do. The government's position is that this is a new type of bill, that it will be the precursor of a new type of legislation in the environmental field in Canada because it does not concern itself so much with correction but with prevention. That is the intention of the government and it is what the bill has been advertised as doing.

Mr. Speaker, we know that from 50 to 100 new substances are manufactured each year. I took these figures from the speech of the former minister of the environment last year when the bill was introduced in substantially the same form. We know the great danger of allowing these substances, which may contaminate the environment, to be produced, sold, put into the environment and then corrected afterwards.

● (2040)

The government has boasted that this bill will establish a mechanism for preventing harmful substances from entering the environment before the fact, not after the fact. If that were the real effect of the bill, I would be the first on behalf of my party to endorse its principle. Yet, when one looks at the bill, one finds that there is slippage between what is intended and what will be the effect. Why do I say this? I know the Minister of the Environment is sincerely concerned about the problems we are trying to solve. This bill will empower the Minister of National Health and Welfare or the Minister of the Environment to take certain steps once it is suspected that certain substances have been created which are dangerous to the environment.

Basically, two steps must be taken. Once it is suspected that a certain substance is harmful to the environment, the government agency which is to be responsible for implementing this legislation must investigate the substance—and it is mandatory, quite properly—in order to determine if it is harmful. The government is empowered by this bill to place that substance on a prohibited list. The bill refers to a schedule on which such substances presumably will be listed. In my view, however, the bill has been defectively drafted. I said this some months ago when this measure was before the previous parliament.

The bill talks about a schedule, yet there is no operative clause which will establish the schedule. That may be a technical or a procedural point; the point is, one cannot establish a schedule unless there is provision for its establishment. We can sort this out later and fix the defect. In any event, once the substance is put on the schedule by the government, it cannot be manufactured or used in a way which will harm the environment.