

Supply

● (1240)

Mr. McMillan: What accord did you get from the Americans?

Mr. Caccia: As we did with acid rain, we laid out the foundation on which the Government could move. We did the preliminary work. There was an agreement with the provinces with respect to acid rain. There was an international agreement as well as a study by the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources to assign a certain amount of money for the modernization of non-ferrous matters and so on. The basis is there. The world did not begin in September, 1984.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Order. The period for questions and comments is now over. Resuming debate.

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, while I do not want in any way to play down the importance of the pollution problems in other parts of the country, I want to spend most of the few moments I have in this debate speaking about the affects of pollution on Lake Ontario. I believe this particular area deserves at least one or two days of consideration, but I will attempt to deal with it in the 20 minutes that I have.

I suggest that we fail to grasp the significance of the problem if we do not consider it an act of criminal proportions when industries pour their killer pollutants into our drinking water. I realize that it is a difficult question and I appreciate that some would rather describe its significance in more muted terms. However, the facts are clear that for many years industries and municipalities, particularly those along the Niagara River, have been aware of the degree to which they were detrimentally affecting the future water quality of Lake Ontario as a result of much of what they dispose finding its way into the waterways of Canada.

What if such action were taken privately? For example, let us assume the Minister of the Environment (Mr. McMillan) lived outside the city and had some pollutants left over from a job which he undertook. If he could not find a satisfactory way to dispose of them and decided to pour them down his neighbour's well, he would be taken to court and put in jail for such a criminal act. In my opinion, that is a situation that is paralleled by what is happening to our drinking water in Canada as a result of what is being allowed to take place within the United States.

I see the Parliamentary Secretary screwing up his nose. The facts are clear that for many years the U.S. administration, as well as the Canadian administration, has been well aware of the implications from pollutants being disposed of either through toxic waste dumps or directly into the Niagara River.

Governments have pussy-footed for so long in trying to deal with this matter that the clean-up operations will now become the responsibility of the public purse when it ought to have been the responsibility of the corporate sector. The cost of meeting that responsibility will be immense.

I make that statement with some anger because I recall that when I spoke about the same kind of problems 18 years ago we received the same basic answers. We were told that further discussion must take place, that through the negotiation process we will find a way to solve the problems, that there will be certain progress forthcoming and that they would implement the proper technology if only it existed.

The Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) will recall a meeting in Stouffville, north of Toronto, that was held in the early 1970s. It was a public meeting held in a school gymnasium with at least 1,500 people in attendance. We were attempting to discuss whether it would be appropriate for liquid industrial waste to be poured into a deep well and pressurized into the ground.

It sounded like a simple process until one began to consider the consequences. Much of the water that serves the northern part of Metropolitan Toronto is drawn from that area. The faults that exist within the rock formations of that part of Ontario are such that any pressure would allow those pollutants to be forced through the ground into the water table. As that debate raged, there were those who actually thought there was no danger because such seepage would take so long that the pollutants would be cleaned up by virtue of passing through the soil. It was suggested that those who held that opinion could put the pollutants in their backyards. In other words, let those who produce the pollutants get rid of them. Perhaps industry would be more concerned and conciliatory in dealing with these problems if they had the responsibility of disposing of these pollutants as well as finding new and innovative uses for them in the manufacturing process.

That argument has been made as a possible solution to the matter. The only problem is that when given the responsibility of disposing of these pollutants, they were put in steel barrels, trucked out to the country and dumped in farmers' fields or along the road. That showed the degree of commitment and concern for the environment by those who were supposed to be trying to protect it.

I repeat that I believe such acts are of criminal proportion. I believe a number of people would share this view, perhaps to a lesser degree. Companies along the Niagara River, primarily but not entirely within the United States, are putting their killer pollutants in our drinking water. This will continue to happen for many years to come, notwithstanding the Minister's latest sojourn into Washington.

My attitude toward this problem is that the pollutants in those dump sites which have been identified should have been and must be dug up and disposed of in an area far removed from the waterways. I say that the Minister used to hold that attitude as well. If we cannot dispose of industrial waste, we must find new and more innovative ways of holding it until adequate disposal can be determined. This can only be done in areas far removed from the major waterways and major sources of drinking water.