

*Environmental Contamination*

Now I should like to turn to that important category which is really the crux of the bill, that is, environmental health. This category is most important and includes the conventionally accepted environmental factors to which reference has been made today by many members in the House. DDT and phosphates have been mentioned. We know the usually accepted environmental factors, such as pure air, high quality water supplies, control of food processing and handling, disposal of sewage, garbage and waste products. Also there are the following: control of animal and insect vectors of disease, the wise use and storage of pesticides, etc.

In addition, our meaning of environmental health encompasses many more aspects, such as noise control, factors affecting home accidents attributed to poorly designed or constructed houses, poor automobile or highway design, factors which have an impact on mental confusion and fatigue and which do not appear in some areas of work among the labouring class. Others are pressures to succeed in work assignments and in the area of cosmetic manufacture and distribution.

● (1730)

It is obvious that the list of hazards to health is limitless. In considering the improvement of environmental health, several important factors must be considered in any approach to legislation. First, I think it should be recognized that individuals can do little to control threats to environmental health. An individual Canadian can do little about them. The corollary is, of course, that governments are expected to introduce measures to protect the health of all Canadians in this area. The third point is that many areas of environmental pollution are not yet totally understood, and require extensive research. The fourth is this. In the past, because of growing public awareness and interest, the government has sometimes over-reacted by taking decisions the effects of which are far-reaching and in certain cases undesirable. I suspect this goes back to the thalidomide experience.

Let me give the House two examples which I am sure all hon. members will recall—the controversy about cyclamates, which were eliminated from the market, and the more recent controversy about DES. This is an aspect which must be considered in any projected legislation.

In the establishment of national priorities and the siting of national standards, a number of equally important factors must be considered before policy decisions are made which will affect accepted social or individual values. Measures to achieve good health effects might involve detrimental economic implications resulting not only in loss of work but in the loss of non-replaceable natural resources. The unwise uprooting of industry, with consequent loss of jobs as the result of health standards which are too high or too inflexible, would be generally unacceptable to Canadians.

Let me identify a few of the environmental factors which call for intervention by the federal government. There is a need for standards of excellence in the food processing industry designed to ensure a supply of high quality foods with good nutritional content. I am sure everyone who has read the report "Nutrition Survey" is well aware of the need for more control in this area. There

[Mr. Holmes.]

is a need to control the levels of animal fat present in food and dairy products; the connection between supersaturated fats and heart disease has only lately become more clearly evident. There is a need for the continued monitoring of cosmetic products, a need to upgrade and assure the quality and effectiveness of drugs, vaccines and so on.

I might mention also the need for controls to ensure the safety of prosthetic devices, and the establishment of safety standards to be followed by automobile manufacturers and by those concerned with homes design and construction. Finally, I might mention the value of setting viable, practical standards to govern air quality, water processing and sewage disposal.

Another area requiring urgent federal involvement arises from the phenomenon of urbanization accompanied by the rapid mushrooming of suburbs. Crowding, the isolation of families, the alienation of individuals, are cardinal features of this typically twentieth century process. Movement from one part of the country to another by large numbers of the population has contributed to the confusion.

While I recognize that this area rightfully belongs to the Department of Urban Affairs, important environmental health factors are involved here, particularly in the light of recent progress toward urban core renewal and the developing policy of establishing satellite cities. Factors which must be considered here include the provision of adequate recreational facilities, the avoidance of high density crowding, and the mental health of people uprooted and relocated as a result of the redevelopment of "old city" areas or the development of suburbs or satellite cities. Manpower and health facilities must be adequately planned so that they are readily available.

A major difficulty about developing an environmental health program has been the minister's inability to develop effective collaboration with other concerned and interested federal government agencies. I have no doubt the minister will respond by referring me to clause 3, subclauses (3) and (4). I quote:

The minister and the Minister of National Health and Welfare shall, in carrying out any activity described in paragraph 1(a), wherever reasonably possible, act jointly and make use of the services and facilities of other departments of the government of Canada or of any agencies thereof.

And, further:

The minister and the Minister of National Health and Welfare may carry out any of the activities described in paragraph 1(a) in co-operation with any government or agency thereof or any body, organization or person.

My point is that from experience in the past I can derive very little re-assurance from the words "wherever reasonably possible" or from the word "may". I suggest that if we are to benefit from a useful environmental health program effective input must be forthcoming not only from the Department of the Environment and from the Department of National Health and Welfare but from the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Urban Affairs, the Ministry of Transport and, indeed, from all other interested groups.

As I indicated earlier, I intend to support this bill. But I wish to emphasize again that in the area of environmental health the minister has picked one tree from the forest; he