

*Canadian Environmental Protection Act*

serious the situation is. I think we all recognize that there are something like 100,000 industrial chemicals in existence in the environment today. Each year approximately 1,000 more chemicals are added. It is out of hand. As Mr. Hall points out, almost all these chemicals have never been tested for any toxicological effect whatsoever. Of the other chemicals, we know very little. We are filling up our environment with tens of thousands of new chemicals, one thousand each year, and we know very little about them. Obviously, that causes a lot of concern.

Mr. Hall makes the case that the blame lies not so much with the Department of the Environment, because the officials working for that Department have had some serious handicaps which prevented them from doing a lot of their work over the last number of years. He indicates in his article that we have seen a parade of 11 Ministers of the Environment, when he calls either disinterested or politically feeble, passing through the Department since 1972. He says successive federal Governments, both Liberal and Conservative, have encouraged weak management, so that the Department of the Environment has become a declawed and neutered tom-cat, showy but unaggressive and docile. It is an interesting observation. When we consider that so many Ministers of the Environment have passed through the system, we see how difficult it is for any Minister to take real control and provide strong leadership for the Department. I think that has been one of the problems for the last number of years.

This particular legislation should be worked on in terms of improvement. We made that effort as a political Party. The New Democrats submitted literally hundreds of suggestions and amendments to improve this particular piece of legislation. While the Government accepted some of the amendments, it rejected an overwhelming number of amendments that we put forward. What I believe we are getting with this Environmental Protection Act is not really the Bill Canadians want in terms of protecting the environment of Canada and, indeed, the environment of the world.

I can say without any hesitation that the legislation is quite weak. While it is called the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, or Bill C-74, it is very modest in scope. It is not really an Environmental Protection Act. It is really an update of the Environmental Contaminates Act, with some aspects of the Ocean Dumping Control Act and the Clear Air Act thrown in. In some cases there has actually been a regression in protection because of a weakening in the regulatory power which used to be in some of these other Acts.

To be fair, Bill C-74 gives the Government the scope to identify toxic substances and the scope to regulate these toxic substances once they have been identified. It gives the Government the ability to screen the substances before they are used in the environment. There is one fundamental improvement in the approach, and that is the change in the onus of proof.

Industry could bring in virtually anything it wanted, after the fact people had to go to a great deal of trouble in order to prove that the substance was toxic, and then some regulation would be brought in. In other words, an industry could introduce some chemical into the environment, and unless one could prove it had adverse toxic effects on our environment, nothing was really done. We have changed the onus, and I think that is a major improvement to the legislation. Industry will now have to convince regulators that substances are safe to use. It will have to show the criteria that it used to prove that point, and the substances we presently use in the system will have to be put on a priority list and tested.

• (1130)

We have some means of redressing the mistakes made in the past. However, let us be very clear that this is a very cumbersome and flawed process. Largely, it relies overwhelmingly on laboratory tests of various sorts. Laboratories deal with substances as you well know, Mr. Speaker, one at a time, and they do not take into account the cumulative effects of different kinds of toxic contaminants. Therefore they do not consider what is happening in the real world, or the environment *per se*. It is one thing to test a chemical for its toxic qualities in a laboratory setting and quite another to see what happens in the real world when, in fact, there could be a serious cumulative effect or an intermixing of chemicals from the natural environment. Let us recognize that it is certainly better than what we have had in the past.

Under the Environmental Protection Act Canadians will have the right to complain to the Government when substances are not identified or regulated to their satisfaction. As a Party, we had amendments in this case which would reduce the number of people necessary to complain in order to initiate some action. However, this is another positive aspect of the Bill.

The Bill will also ban the export of toxic substances when the use of the substances is banned in Canada. You might think, Mr. Speaker, who on earth would export a toxic substance that was banned in Canada to another country, often a Third World country. You would be surprised, Mr. Speaker, since there are literally hundreds of cases of not very scrupulous exporters taking advantage of products that have been banned in our country for obvious reasons, that is, because of their harmful effects on the environment, and then exporting those to other countries. That now will be stopped. This is a major step forward that this legislation has provided us.

The Bill will also give the Government the right to regulate fuels on the basis of environment quality. Here again, this is something that we are very pleased to see because emissions from motor vehicles are a prime source of pollution, particularly in our metropolitan areas. Also, it is well known that the emissions contribute to acid rain. This particular element gives the Government an opportunity to act in the future in order to keep down the pollutants going into our atmosphere.