

Adjournment Debate

I am particularly affected by the government's inaction since I personally was evacuated from Saint-Basile-le-Grand because of the PCB fire that night in August 1988. It was a real disaster and in the weeks that followed, many people lost a lot of money. They were very anxious, but during that time, the government, through the Department of Transport, the Department of the Environment and even the Prime Minister, assured them that the government would look after Saint-Basile-le-Grand, would solve the PCB problem throughout Canada and really deal with environmental problems, if they were trusted and given a second mandate. That was in 1988.

Mr. Speaker, we in Quebec had a singer called Félix Leclerc. He is dead now, but one of his songs goes like this: "Before the election, the candidate called me son, but after the election, he did not even know my name." Quebecers and, I think, Canadians rather have the feeling that after campaigning for the 1988 election on an environmental platform, this government has forgotten its promises. That is the reason why, when I directed my question concerning the environment to the Prime Minister a few weeks ago, I blamed the government for being all talk and no action.

At the national level, several environmental protection agencies have blamed the government for its lack of action, but in my Chambly riding the Richelieu River is completely polluted. As I said we are still waiting for the Federal Government to show leadership with this matter of PCBs by perhaps working in conjunction together with the Provincial Government to rid Quebec of various toxic wastes.

• (1825)

I wish to emphasize a point which is very important these days in connection with the Meech Lake Accord and other constitutional issues. Quebecers want to have proof that federalism is a cost effective political system within which the Federal and Provincial Governments can work together to solve serious problems. So far, Mr. Speaker, there has been no evidence of it and this is a two year old situation.

Finally, I should like to tell you a little story. I have been here now for eight weeks as the member for Chambly I can tell you that I campaigned for two years in an effort to get elected to the House of Commons and one of the points I always tried to make was that the Government was not doing enough for the Chambly environment. Goodness gracious, I received a great many visits from all sorts of ministers, including some Environment Ministers, the Prime Minister himself

twice, and various Provincial Premiers. All the Federal Ministers told me to trust them for a few more weeks, because the Minister of Environment was going to reveal a great plan to deal with our problems. Yes, you guessed right! Mr. Speaker, the Minister came out not so much with a Green Plan as with an Empty Plan. That is the reason why today I say again to the Government that as far as the environment is concerned, it is all talk and no action.

Mr. Lee Clark (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): First of all, I wish to congratulate the Hon. Member for his by-election victory in the Chambly riding.

[*English*]

I would also like to welcome the hon. member to the House. This is the first opportunity I have had to do that and to say that I welcome his interest in environmental issues. I look forward to his participation in questions and debates during upcoming months and years.

The hon. member has made reference to the record of the government. I would like to make one or two points in return. Since the government was elected in 1984 there have been a number of very noteworthy achievements. Time does not permit me to be very extensive, but I would refer to two or three.

I would refer to the acid rain agreement by which the federal government and the seven most easterly provinces have agreed to reduce sulphur dioxide emissions by 50 per cent from 1980 levels by 1994. I am pleased that indeed we have made good progress in that regard.

I also look forward to the signing of an accord with the United States again with respect to acid rain abatement because I know that is vitally important to all of Canada, and I would suspect that it is of particular importance to the hon. member's constituency.

I would also make reference to the signing of the Montreal Protocol on the ozone layer. I think most of us in this House are very conscious of the fact that emissions of CFCs have proved to be extremely detrimental. The existence of the hole in Antarctica is well known. It is perhaps less well known that even if we take the kind of very substantial measures that are planned, that is the virtual reduction of CFC emissions by the year 2000, CFC residues in the atmosphere will continue to be a threat to mankind for the next 100 years. That is exceedingly chilling and only demonstrates how vital it is for Canada and all of the international communities to work together in furthering the achievement of that objective.

I also refer to the passage of the CEPA legislation in 1988 before the hon. member came to the House. I think