

Water Resources

● (3:50 p.m.)

However, the magnitude of our water resources and the exceptionally heavy use we have made of them have produced problems of proportional magnitude. So, the first factor we must face is that of the enormity of the problem and the historical nature of the background which has led to it.

The second factor we must face is that, by its very nature, water admits of many uses. Not all, as I have said before, are compatible one with the other. This problem is compounded by the fact that our water resources are so large that a single river may be called upon to fulfil many uses in its journey to the sea. It may be used to transport logs, cool a thermal electric plant, generate hydroelectricity, provide water for cities, irrigate farm lands and carry industrial waste. Each of these different uses requires a different standard of quality and different controls of river flow volumes. Moreover, different river basins will have different mixes of these uses.

This suggested to us and to the planners, the key principle that must be incorporated into the act. Obviously, the key principle is that of flexibility. This we tried to build into this legislation. We cannot impose the same formula on all waters in Canada, because our diverse waters have widely divergent uses and pass through widely different areas. It would, for example, be unreasonable and impractical to expect a busy harbour surrounded by a large city to attain the same degree of purity as a mountain trout stream. Its uses are vastly different. Society would be ill served by imposing the level of quality appropriate to Lake Louise on Hamilton Harbour. Nevertheless, because of their great volume, the effluents entering Hamilton Harbour will very likely require more treatment, and to a higher standard, than will the small volume of effluents entering Lake Louise. The Canada water bill, therefore, provides that we undertake comprehensive planning on a basin-by-basin basis.

There is a second key factor in the bill as we have conceived it, Mr. Speaker. It postulates that we first establish the present and future uses of a body of water. Then, in consultation with all interested parties, we plan comprehensively to optimize its use so that we may derive the maximum benefits.

The second problem we were faced with, was a problem that is very unique to Canada. Just as Canada faces a unique physical environment, so too does it face another unique situation. When the British North America

[Mr. Greene.]

Act was written, no one could possibly have anticipated the problems we face today over water resources. Indeed, in 1867, water was so plentiful and clean that it would have been difficult to imagine that it could ever require the attention it now does. Consequently, little attention was paid to water as such in the B.N.A. Act. The right hon. gentleman opposite has sometimes suggested that the Prime Minister of that time was not much interested in water, anyway. Perhaps that had something to do with the constitutional deficiency.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): He probably thought it was not pure.

Mr. Greene: In some ways, Mr. Speaker, water was a natural resource and as such came within the ambit of provincial responsibility under the B.N.A. Act. The boundary water treaty, and the realities of the situation itself, gave to the federal government many responsibilities concerning our boundary waters with the United States. International waters, in many of their aspects, came under federal jurisdiction by virtue of our constitutional responsibility for international affairs. The B.N.A. Act did, indeed, assign to the federal government specific legislative authority over certain aspects of our waters. In particular, it gave us control over navigation, fisheries, and over waters which cross from one province to another and which are subject at least to federal mediation and, for some purposes, federal control.

Thus, as with many other subject matters, the jurisdictional responsibility for water is divided between the federal and provincial governments. This is the most important single aspect of the constitutional environment within which we must work. This situation suggested another vital principle which had to be incorporated into the Canada water bill, namely, that we in the federal government must approach water problems in a co-operative spirit with the provinces. No one level of government is capable of handling all problems pertaining to a river, especially if they pertain to an inter-jurisdictional river.

The bill, accordingly, has been conceived to take clear recognition of the fact of the split responsibility. Responsibility is split between the provinces and the federal government and we must recognize that if we are really to do the job of re-establishing our waters. The bill establishes the framework for intergovernmental co-operation which is vital to its success and the management of our waters. We have invited the provinces, municipalities, the