

Water Resources

It is interesting that Your Honour should have confused that hon. member with myself. My hon. friend, when he was minister, made a statement in the House making it clear that federal participation in these conservation projects covered conservation and recreation. The spirit and intent of the legislation were made clear at that time. Nevertheless, subsequent administrations failed to honour that intention.

Although the conservation authorities have sought to obtain federal moneys to improve parkland and the like, the federal government has on every occasion declined to provide any money on the ground that authority was not specifically given in the act, despite anything the minister may have said or whatever commitment had been made. I blame this entirely on the senior civil servants of the department. One is not supposed to mention these people; they are faceless, sacred cows who should never be criticized. I do not think that is a valid attitude. We have plenty of information to indicate that senior officials of the department are always opposed to any contribution being made by the federal government for recreational purposes, and they have been able to persuade subsequent ministers to adopt this point of view.

The federal government has succeeded in welching and weaseling out of paying its share of these conservation projects. With the advent of this legislation, welching and weaseling will be a little simpler. No argument will be necessary, because it will not be obliged to pay a cent from now on if it does not wish to do so.

For this reason, as well as for others, many of us are entirely opposed to the legislation in its present form. The federal government is anxious to project a good image as a government which is taking the lead in conservation and opposing water pollution. I am sure everybody in the country would support it in taking such a position. But now the legislation is before us it is clear that its main purpose is to gain all the kudos it can from the point of view of public relations, without putting up a nickel—while abdicating most of the financial responsibility it has undertaken in this regard in the past.

The minister is a man for whom I have high regard and with whom I have enjoyed a very pleasant association over the years. I sincerely hope he will give consideration to the suggestions made by members of the opposition; that he will withdraw his bill and

[Mr. Nesbitt.]

incorporate some of our proposals in a new one. We cannot all be wrong, you know! I am sure that should he do so, he would receive a great deal of acclaim and support from all sides of the House, particularly if he would put a few teeth into the legislation he presents.

• (9:30 p.m.)

Mr. John Gilbert (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, it has been rightly and justly said that we get the government that we deserve. It can be rightly and justly said that we are getting the pollution we deserve. We are moving from an affluent society to an effluent society. When we think of the spewing out into our lakes, rivers, soil and air of vast quantities of waste and spent products that pollute and poison our air and water and impair our ability to feed ourselves, is it any wonder that we are moving from an affluent society to an effluent society?

We have been graced this evening with the speech of the hon. member for Burnaby-Seymour (Mr. Perrault) who put the debate on a very high level. He put the question into the international sphere and spoke well and ably about it. We also heard from the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt), who gave some credit to his party for initiating action in the United Nations and set forth some problems with which we may be faced if this legislation passes.

I hope that when the bill goes to committee, or perhaps when the minister closes the debate, he will answer some of the questions put to him by the last speaker, particularly the point about the 37½ per cent contribution in regard to conservation projects, which the hon. member indicated a former minister of the government had said included recreational projects. We are discussing a very important matter and I am sure we could have 264 speakers on the subject of pollution, because pollution affects all the areas that we as members represent. As the hon. member for Burnaby-Seymour said, it has international implications of a startling nature.

I have had the good fortune of being a member of the Standing Committee on National Resources and Public Works. The committee has had before it the estimates and officials of the two departments. I gained the impression that their presentations to the committee and their answers to the question put to them by members were indicative of inaction on the part of the government.