

Request for Environmental Council

obstacles we encounter in Canada is that each province wants to run its own little show, to decide what it is willing to do about pollution, what steps it will take to induce industry to establish itself in the area, and so on. I am inclined to be a federalist, Mr. Speaker, believing we could control our environment better if the authority to do so were in the hands of the federal government. When I think of what we did in respect of our fisheries under the present constitution, the way we handed over those fisheries rights to the provinces, some by letter and some by order in council, and the way these are being administered in the different provinces, I realize this sort of opting out by the government leaves a lot to be desired.

A few months ago I attended a conference on the environment held in Bonn, West Germany. Before I went there I thought we were far behind other nations in the world, but after attending this conference in which representatives of some 22 other nations took part I formed the opinion that we were far ahead of many other countries. This parliament and this government have nothing to be ashamed of when it comes to what has been done in the last four years to control pollution. As late as this evening I received a letter from my local Pollution Probe group—a very active and responsible group of people.

We very much hope that an agreement will be reached soon between the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the President of the United States which will eliminate some of the air pollution coming from the south across the river. Groups such as the one I have mentioned have done tremendous work in suggesting legislation and following up the legislation which has been handed to them for use. It is possible that we, as federal members, have been negligent in not assisting them with our advice in the past. However, with the limited facilities available to us in Ottawa it is hard to do more than carry on our duties in our offices on Parliament Hill.

As to pollution of the Great Lakes, I have a stack of books and reports on this subject; I could fill a wheelbarrow with them. I think it is time an agreement was signed. It is time the Americans did something to clean up the pollution on their side so that more could be done on the Canadian side.

[Translation]

Mr. Henry Latulippe (Compton): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply concerned by the problem of pollution mentioned in the motion proposed by the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Harding).

We are a hundred per cent in favour of this plan, and we and many others would like to see something done and to see the causes of the pollution which we now experience in this country eradicated.

Mr. Speaker, pollution has become one of the most urgent issues of our day. In fact, it is a threat to our survival and that of generations to come.

In face of those facts, we all agree that means have to be found to solve this problem.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that under the present system we have considered so far that it was more important to preserve the financial system than to protect mankind. Yet, this financial system, which is becoming stronger by the day, deprives citizens of the means to build purification

[Mr. Whelan.]

plants to protect us from pollution, which is becoming more and more serious every day.

In the face of this, we must say that the causes of this problem are not new. We must admit that we have been hearing about pollution for several years, but also that the problem has not been solved, even though we have found solutions to it.

We have had experts make studies in order to find means to eliminate pollution. And the solution lies in building treatment plants of different types. We have everything required to do so. We have the know-how. Nobody doubts that we could find the skills required to draw up plans, to solve these problems in every municipality.

Mr. Speaker, we have not solved the problem yet. A mere handful of plants have been built. At what cost? With funds borrowed at interest rates of up to 9 or 10 per cent. I know municipalities which borrowed at 10 per cent interest to build waste treatment plants. Being already in debt, they took on additional burdens. The federal government therefore was able to help them. We know the contributions the government made to assist them, but they are inadequate.

Most municipalities have not been able to avail themselves of federal or provincial assistance.

• (2100)

Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that we are facing a tremendous pollution problem. All citizens agree that it is becoming more serious every day. It has become increasingly serious for the people, and for animal life in the water, in the air and on land. Because of that pollution, animals are dying, especially fish. We find many fish along the banks of our rivers and lakes, the victims of pollution, while we should be doing everything possible to protect our natural resources.

Mr. Speaker, we must find the means of remedying the situation. At the present time, the government wastes money right and left, spending on local initiatives and opportunities for youth projects.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Latulippe: Millions of dollars are spent on those programs, 90 per cent of which are wasted.

Some hon. Members: That is not so.

Mr. Latulippe: We could have invested that money, created assets and protected the people.

We could have protected the lives of our citizens. All available funds, the action of youth and their studies can be used to fight against water pollution. We can make them continue their studies and draw up plans. We can encourage them to assist municipalities. With those funds we could lead our young people so that they may do something practical and useful instead of wasting our money for all kinds of silly undertakings.

Mr. Béchard: Does the hon. member mean that Quebecers and Canadians are spendthrifts?