

Agreements Respecting Marginal Lands

from time to time, and at such times hereafter as they shall see fit, and they are hereby authorized and empowered to enter into and upon the lands of any person or persons, bodies politic or corporate, in the city of London, or within fifteen miles of the said city and to survey, set out, and ascertain such parts thereof as they may require for the purposes of the said water-works, and also to divert and appropriate any river, pond of water, spring or stream of water therein, as they shall judge suitable and proper—

That provision might have been all right in 1873 when there were a few thousands of people in the city of London. However, to-day we have a city with a population of 162,000.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): It is a fine city.

Mr. White: By conservative estimates it is expected that the population of London will be 300,000 in the next 20 years. In other words, the present method of securing water is not satisfactory. In other words, water is being stolen from the surrounding farms and it is just about time that this was discontinued.

In addition to this city of London bill, there are several other provincial bills that have set up the water resources commission and others, but they have not corrected the glaring injustice that has been heaped on the surrounding municipalities. There are untold examples I could quote. However, I am going to use this one of which I know from a personal experience. I refer to a well in which the water 50 years ago was within six feet of the top. Today it is 68 feet to the water level. Yet the public utilities commission would tell us that this procedure is not reducing the water table in western Ontario. I am using this example from the county of Middlesex, but the situation applies to practically all of old Ontario west of Toronto. I am not so well acquainted with the rest of the province.

The Ontario water resources commission admit that surface wells in western Ontario will fail in the not too distant future. They also admit that deep artesian wells now owned by farmers are destined to fail if continued and unrestricted exploitation continues. Therefore I think the time has arrived when some action should be taken on the part of the governments concerned, at all levels. To-day more farmers in the area are short of water than ever before. Some are drawing water from ponds and lakes; some are buying water.

In addition to this, London's water supply is known as hard water, and some industries and householders are paying more for water softeners and water softening equipment than they are paying for the water they soften. Yet western Ontario is nearly surrounded by

[Mr. White.]

fresh, soft water. There is fresh water and there is soft water. There is lake Huron on the north, lake St. Clair, the river St. Clair and river Detroit on the west, and lake Erie to the south.

The London public utilities commission is now engaged in drilling for water within approximately 15 miles of lake Erie. In other words, they are pretty near out in the lake drilling for water now, but at the same time they are stealing water from surrounding municipalities. I doubt whether 15 per cent of the farm population in my area have deep wells.

The city of London is saying to these farmers, "If we dry your well, we will supply you with water". But supposing a few years hence the farmer drills a well and the water table has lowered to the point where he does not reach water? Are they going to supply it to him? No, definitely not. And if they do supply it to him, they will only supply it at a price.

We should take a look at the history of other lands once fertile, green and forested, which over the centuries have become denuded of trees, short of water, and semi-arid. They are the bible lands, Babylon, Greece, north Africa and the Mediterranean area. If we take a look to the south, to the United States, we see that there one farmer in every four is co-operating in the nation's conservation plans.

In Canada we have polluted lakes and rivers, and the hon. member for Lambton West has drawn this very graphically to the attention of the authorities from time to time. The royal commission on forestry reported in 1947 that in old Ontario over five million acres of waste land should be returned to forest.

According to Rand McNally's standard world atlas, Canada's land area is shown as being only 3 per cent arable, and then we talk rather glibly about our inexhaustible natural resources.

It is in this regard that I welcome, as I said before, the introduction today of this resolution by the minister. Following on what I have already stated, we have now arrived at a time when I believe we should protect the rights of minorities. I would respectfully refer to the other place. This was one of the duties assigned to the other place at the time of confederation.

Legislation that would define the rights to water resources is overdue. The Ontario water resources commission is so far, the only hope, as it is aware of this problem confronting all of old Ontario and is making far-reaching studies in this connection.

I apologize to the house for taking up a little time in dealing with what is in a way