

*Clean Air Act*

hope we will pass this afternoon, is designed to establish the required reciprocity.

In my view the action we are taking in Parliament today is important on at least two counts. First, it demonstrates, as the minister has pointed out, both to the Canadian public and perhaps more important to the American public, that all political parties in the Canadian Parliament are united in a resolve to deal with the growing problem of acid rain as it affects Canada and the United States. So concerned are we, that Liberals, New Democrats and Progressive Conservatives alike are willing to set aside our legitimate partisanship to make possible the speedy passage of this bill. If all goes well, the House will proceed through all three stages of the bill in this afternoon's sitting, although the normal course might have taken weeks, if not months.

Second, apart from the symbolic importance of the passage of the bill, our quick action today will increase pressure on the United States federal and state governments to abate acid rain-causing emissions in the United States that harm not only their country but our country as well.

As the minister and hon. members of the House know, other members and I are members of a special subcommittee on acid rain established a few months ago by the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry. The subcommittee has been conducting public hearings across Canada, as well as meeting with legislators and experts in Canada and in other countries.

In the fall we visited Washington, D.C., where we met with Republican and Democratic senators, and members of the House of Representatives, perhaps a couple of dozen in all, who were concerned about acid rain. The clear message that we got from our American colleagues—and I echo the sentiment expressed by the minister—was that the United States public is largely unaware of the acid rain problem either in the United States or in Canada, and that most politicians in the United States have yet to treat the issue with any real degree of seriousness. Yet, in Canada, acid rain has been described variously as the “killer pollutant”, the “rain of death”, an “environmental time bomb”, the “worst environmental hazard Canada has ever faced”, and an “international emergency”. I am sure the minister will agree with me that there is no reason to believe the problem is any more severe here than it is in the United States.

In the two countries some areas now receive precipitation five to 40 times more acidic than natural rain. Some readings have been shown to contain 400 times the normal amount of acid. In Canada and in the United States that lethal pollutant is killing lakes, rivers and streams. It is devastating forests and crop lands. It is even harming human health.

In northern New York state, for example, all of the fish are gone from more than 100 Adirondack lakes. The air pollution on White Mountain, which is 5,000 feet high, is commonly worse than that of mid-town New York City. By the same token, in Ontario some 2,000 to 4,000 lakes have been declared biologically dead, that is, unable to sustain fish or plant life. Some 48,000 more lakes are said to be threatened.

A recent Canada-United States scientific survey, in which the minister can take pride, has documented that the problem of acid rain is more geographically widespread and more severe than even the worst assessments had previously indicated. The study has determined that all of North America, east of a line between Hudson Bay and New Orleans, is suffering from acid rain, and that trouble spots have been identified in the west.

In my region of the Atlantic provinces, acid rain has wiped out salmon fishing in some 12 rivers, and in my own province of Prince Edward Island, which had hitherto been considered relatively invulnerable to the effects of acid rain, concern about the problem is fast approaching one of alarm. Not only is acid rain a serious problem in both Canada and the United States, each country is responsible for a substantial part of the acid rain that falls on the other. Acid rain often drops miles, even countries, away from its original source. We know that every year about four million metric tons of acid rain-causing sulphur dioxide cross from the United State into Canada. For its part, Canada emits about five million tonnes, of which one million tonnes cross into the United States.

I do not intend to speak at any length this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, but in my concluding remarks I want to stress that neither country can afford to be complacent if the other fails to act against the acid rain-causing emissions within its borders.

When members of the subcommittee to which I referred were in Washington, D.C., United States Senators and Congressmen urged our committee on acid rain to consider seriously ways in which our parliamentarians at all levels might make direct representations to the United States federal and state legislatures to heighten their awareness of the acid rain problem. Although such an approach might not conform to diplomatic niceties or protocol, in my view and in the view of my party it is one which the minister might want to consider and is a worthy one. It cannot be denied that dramatic, perhaps unprecedented action is required to promote public awareness of the problem among the United States public and U.S. government officials. It is to be hoped that passage of Bill C-51 is a step in the same direction. I urge upon hon. members that no amount of preaching by Canadians will do any good if we in this country do not take strong measures to deal with the problem within our own borders.

● (1530)

I commend the Minister of the Environment for his vigorous opposition to the United States' multibillion dollar plan to convert power plants from oil to coal, which is a major source of sulphur dioxide that contributes to the acid rain problem. The head of the United States environmental protection agency, Mr. Douglas Costle, has estimated that acid rainfall may well increase by 16 per cent to 20 per cent in the northeastern tier states within the next decade if the plan for coal conversion proceeds. He has conceded that the spillover into Canada will be serious. This has been documented by Canadian scientists.