

*Adjournment Debate*

Incidentally, comparing those rates to tobacco related diseases, 4,000 for Canada is much less than the 35,000 people who die from tobacco related diseases who are directly smokers, but it is a lot more than the people that we have been able to document, which is in the hundreds, who are dying from the indirect consequences. This is a very serious problem, probably affecting a substantial number of people in Canada.

We cannot approve the association of acid rain and health consequences in an experimental fashion, which is in a way similar to the fact that we cannot prove a connection between tobacco smoking and lung cancer or heart disease deaths. It is a statistical association. There will never be more than a statistical association, because morally speaking we could not separate people at birth into groups who will be exposed to acid rain, or tobacco smoke, and people who will not be exposed, or who will be minimally exposed and in years later see what rates of cancer they get. Cancer takes a long time to develop; respiratory ailments usually take some time, although in the case of asthma there may be immediate consequences. It would be unconscionable to do that type of thing, and totally impossible to think about it. So the statistical association must be investigated.

That would help us considerably in our fight for acid rain in the United States. That is where at least half of our fight for acid rain controls has to take place, because half of our acid rain in Canada comes from the United States. American Congressmen and Senators would be much more keen on tough measures if they could see the health consequences, and not only the effects on the environment. Given their legislative programs and the atmosphere in which they work, that would help our American friends who are concerned about the environment and give them useful ammunition in the struggle for good, strong laws and programs.

Unfortunately, that is not what our Government has been doing. I am sorry to say also in the case of the recent conference in Geneva on emissions of nitrogen oxides of various sorts, our Government's representatives took a very complacent attitude indeed. What they asked for was simply not adequate. We need tough emission standards for cars and trucks. There needs to be real reductions. Instead, Canada opted for a freeze which is not to come into effect immediately, but after some years. In the meantime, these pollutants are increasing in quantity. I suspect in our very approach to the question of so-called critical loadings, that the Minister likes to talk about, that in the case of the nitrogen oxides each country would set its critical loads, how much the environment can take and still survive.

● (1815)

I suspect that these amounts have not been estimated correctly. We do not know what are the consequences of these kinds of emissions year after year. We do not know whether the effects in areas where there has already been substantial destruction have been reversed.

The same goes for health consequences which were not considered when the critical load numbers were decided upon. It became a much more political exercise—what can we get the Americans to accept, not what are the health consequences or how can we protect the Canadian natural environment and the health of Canadians?

We need to go a very long way in pressing our case with the Americans. I am sorry that the opportunity in Geneva was not taken for Canada to be a leader in the reduction of emissions. Canada took the same position which the Americans have been taking on acid rain in our bilateral discussions, that is, that the case has not been proven, that we can be complacent, and that we do not have to worry about it.

We have a long way to go to clean up our own act. I urge the Government, when it looks at the issue of critical loads, to consider the health consequences, to look seriously at what is happening to the health of Canadians, and to look seriously at what is happening to our waters, forests, and farms.

**Mr. Jim Hawkes (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council):** Madam Speaker, the Government shares the Hon. Member's concern about the potential linkage between acid rain and health consequences. However, I do not think the Government shares the Hon. Member's view that scientific data are irrelevant, can be ignored, or can be taken on one side of the fence.

It is clear from scientists in a number of countries that the link between particular health hazards and the presence or absence of acid rain cannot be proved or disproved.

I think the Hon. Member knows that the Department of National Health and Welfare has been actively engaged in research and attending international symposiums around the world because of the concern that there might indeed be a link and that steps might have to be taken if those links are at all demonstrated. She mentioned the studies on lung function, particularly in children, conducted by Health and Welfare Canada in terms of areas where acid rain pollution was high and areas where acid rain pollution was low. There was a 2 per cent impact in high pollution areas on lung functioning, but certainly no correlation was established with lung disease. In fact, when children were removed from the pollution, lung functioning returned to normal. I think that is the scientific evidence.

Similarly the Department has conducted studies in the cottage areas of Canada where water is sitting around in cisterns and in tanks of one kind or another. There are elevated levels of chemicals associated with acid rain, but a flushing of the systems tends to remove the contaminants, so they are relatively easy to get rid of.

A major study is under way, sponsored by the Government of Canada in collaboration with American environmental scientists. It is a five-year population based study which may provide us with more answers down the road. It is just another indication of the Government's concern for this issue.