

S. O. 52

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Minister for his proposal. I think we still have a problem. Maybe. . .

• (2210)

[*English*]

Perhaps during the speech of the very distinguished Member, a former Premier of my province, the Province of British Columbia, representatives of all Parties could again consult and come back to the Speaker with a proposition which includes all of the considerations that seem to be bothering some Members. I now wish to move on with the debate. The Hon. Member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca (Mr. Barrett).

Mr. David Barrett (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured and pleased to take my place in this debate. Quite frankly, however, I would have preferred this debate never to have occurred in the House. All of us would have wanted to avoid the consequences of an oil spill, and certainly we want Government action and response to it.

Tonight, three Government spokespersons have attempted to patronize, not only the Opposition but Canadians, with sophomoric speeches, without any mention of the real problems that exist with this crisis on the waters bordering Canada and British Columbia.

When a Member stands for the House of Commons and hopes that his or her Party will form a majority government and he or she may be asked to be a Minister of the Crown, they assume a responsibility with that ministerial position. Tonight we are debating an emergency motion moved by my colleague from Skeena (Mr. Fulton). We are debating the issue of an oil spill. I am not questioning the Minister's sincerity, but others might. Had he been aware and sincere about this, and had he been alert, he would have been in the House yesterday to make a ministerial statement about that oil spill. No one would have turned that down. If we are to believe that the Government is truly concerned, the Minister could have come to the House today and asked leave of the House to make a ministerial statement. He did not do that. He had the nerve to come here and plead for understanding from the House and Canadians, after he was forced to make a statement as a result of a motion by my colleague. It begs the question: What have you been doing? Do you not understand this problem? Why have you not come to the House? Why have you not dealt with this issue?

This is not a new issue. It is not fortuitous that this is an accident that has repeated itself in 90 days. It is tragic. We, along with a government Member, went up to the coastal waters of offshore British Columbia. We saw the damage. We held a press conference.

All six New Democratic Members from Vancouver Island held a press conference on January 25. It was a very modest press statement in which we did not blame the Government. We stated that in order to learn from this experience there should be a public inquiry so that we could follow, step by step, what action was taken by the Government, the Coast Guard and volunteers, and determine what went right and what went wrong. Such a report could be tabled before us so that we could learn from this tragedy.

The Minister responsible pleads for understanding in this House. Just so that we understand exactly where this Minister stands when he makes the amateur appeal that it is not the Government's fault and we should keep a cool head and learn from these things, let me point out that on January 31 this year, my colleague, the Hon. Member for Saanich—Gulf Islands (Ms. Hunter) wrote a letter to the Minister.

I must say it is a modest letter because she is a new Member. I would have been far more strong in my words. However, she was polite, modest, thoughtful and caring in an attempt to get some action. I would have simply kicked the slats out of you. I will do it tonight because you deserve it. More than anyone else in the Government you deserve it. You deserve the slats kicked out from you.

Mr. Speaker: Whether the Hon. Minister deserves that or not, the Hon. Member will have to address his remarks to the Minister through the Chair.

Mr. Barrett: I would never remove the slats from the Speaker's chair. I want to make that clear, Mr. Speaker.

I want to quote from the body of this letter addressed to the Minister on January 31: It reads: "I along with other Members of Parliament from Vancouver Island call for an immediate public inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the oil spill and the resultant response. Clearly there must be a comprehensive examination of the facts to determine how and why this happened, how and why the federal Government took so long to respond and how we can ensure a quicker and more efficient response in the event of another oil spill in the future".