

The other day a tug had an explosion on board 14 miles off the west coast of Vancouver Island. The barge had to be cut loose and was floating around the ocean for a number of hours before it was rescued. Fortunately, the seas were relatively calm, and because the Government has been sensitized to these issues, it was able to jump on the problem fairly quickly. Perhaps next time we will not be so lucky.

The case is overwhelming for an immediate major investigation which would take the form of a public inquiry in order that the people can have some confidence in the results and give their input. I hope the initial indications that the Minister has given that he is beginning to see the need for at least some public input will flower into a commitment in the next day or two for a public inquiry. The time is long overdue.

**Ms. Mitchell:** I also wish to rise on the same point. All of us from British Columbia, and I hope all Members of the House, are extremely worried about the lack of protection, the lack of planning, the lack of resources, and the lack of safety measures to both prevent and contain future spills.

The Hon. Member for Victoria (Mr. Brewin) knows that there is a particular vulnerability on the Gulf Islands, to which I have a special attachment, and to the San Juan Islands, a group of beautiful islands between Vancouver Island and the mainland.

I would like to ask the Hon. Member particularly about the risk connected with the Cherry Point refinery where spills could happen. As the Hon. Member pointed out, there is frequent transport of oil through those straits, which is a very dangerous and narrow passageway into the Cherry Point refinery. The risk element is very high. I would like the Hon. Member to comment on that. It is bad enough on the west coast of Vancouver Island. However, in the centre area where there is no sweep out to the sea it would be worse, if that is possible.

Since the Hon. Member is a lawyer of some renown, I would like to ask him what responsibility there is for payment on the part of offenders. In the past history it was American companies that were responsible for the spill that hit our coastline of British Columbia. Does the Canadian Government have a fund from which to immediately pay volunteers who help with the clean-up, something which has not been the case in the past? I understand Canada has some type of legal fund but that it is not available to pay helpers in the event of a spill.

### *Transportation Accident Investigation Board*

Another issue I would like to mention while I am on my feet is the need for a standard policy of double-bottomed tankers as part of the safety measures.

• (1550)

**Mr. Brewin:** My colleague, the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell), has hurled a number of specific issues at me, on each of which I could speak for considerable length, but it may divert us. I suppose I should divert myself as far as I possibly can from the individual issues, but let me deal with a couple of points. I presume I only have a couple of seconds left.

First of all, one of the things about this Bill is that the findings of the Board are not binding. There is to be no civil or criminal liability assigned by the Board, nor are its findings to be construed as such. As the Member by implication has pointed out, the Government needs to bring forward some companion legislation to deal with the sharing and burden of costs of these oil spills.

The Exxon company is going to be facing hundreds of millions of dollars of costs, which of course it will just pass on to the consumer after its insurance runs out. Apparently even the limits of its insurance will not cover what is done.

The next oil spill may be caused by a company with very few assets, and then the public will be stuck with it. One of the questions for a public inquiry would be: What insurance is being carried? What guarantee is there that there will be any company standing behind the insurance or any funds standing behind the insurance? What about the volunteers? What about the tourist industry, the home owners, the native fishermen and other fishermen on the coast, all of whom may well suffer damages?

In the west coast oil spill which happened in December and January, we on this side have proposed that the Government immediately establish a compensation fund. I think my colleague from Comox—Alberni is going to be introducing a motion if he has not done so already.

**An Hon. Member:** It is done.

**Mr. Brewin:** "It is done", I am told. It calls on the Government to establish a compensation fund so that those who are hurt do not have to go into American courts and go through international lawsuits and the complexity of that. The people should pay, the Government should compensate the people who have been damaged, and then the Government should take on the responsibility of suing. There are thousands of aspects to