

Oil Pollution

Mr. Pringle: Again for the benefit of members heckling me, let me tell them that at this time the flood situation in British Columbia is well in hand.

An hon. Member: That is more than you can say for the political situation.

Mr. Pringle: The main problem in transporting oil, as I see it, is that there is very little possibility of our ever stopping transportation of oil on the high seas. Until such time as we are able to return to burning wood or coal in our ships, or build ships driven by nuclear energy, we will have to use oil. I am not in any way suggesting that we should support the transportation of oil from Alaska to Cherry Point. But I am suggesting that we endeavour to rationalize the problem and that we look squarely at what the problem is. In other words, I suggest we endeavour to beat pollution, not try to kill the industry in the hope that the pollution will go away.

We know that oil spills have taken place and they will continue to take place. I wish the problem were so easy that we just turn a key and say that there shall be no more oil transported on the high seas of the world. If we could do that we would never dump oil into our oceans. But the solution is not quite that simple, and for this reason. If, Mr. Speaker, you examine the oil spill situation at Cherry Point, as I have done, you will find that it is not a case of a collision occurring in the Straits of Juan de Fuca, or a boat colliding with a rock or obstruction, breaking up and spilling oil. It is a case of pure negligence in the inspection of the equipment used when unloading or loading this ship at Cherry Point. As long as there are humans involved we will have to tighten up our inspection procedures.

This is why a reference to the International Joint Commission is vital. The commission can study the problem and devise proper methods and, hopefully, solutions which they would then report back to the government. If this question is debated at a future date, I should like to deal at length with many other points relating to this subject, but my point today is there is no relationship between the transportation of oil from Alaska on the high seas and the particular oil spill from a boat at Cherry Point.

Consider the case of a boat taking on 2,000 or 3,000 thousand gallons of oil to fuel its burners in order to sail through the Straits of Juan de Fuca and down to San Francisco. If the man responsible for pumping in the oil happened to put the nozzle, instead of into the spout, accidentally on one side of the spout and 3,000 gallons of oil were dumped into the sea, would this mean that we would seek to prevent the transportation of oil on the high seas? There are many aspects to this problem and I hope that the House of Commons will consider placing the problem where it belongs. Instead of dealing with it emotionally and without thought the day after a spill occurs, let us conduct a proper investigation so we are able to rationalize the problem.

It is all very well to say that the government has been taking its time, but the point is this. It is easy for members of the opposition to be irresponsible and to get up and shout, because they do not have to be responsible to the general public or for relations between the United States

and Canada, an important relationship indeed. We must first make sure that we are on solid ground. Certainly I have heard very little from the opposition apart from the cry "we have oil on our beaches". Although this is a very sad situation and cannot in any way be belittled, there is a matter here that we must investigate. I therefore present my motion to the House and I hope that all members of the House of Commons will support it.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I now understand why the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) made his statement in the House today. Certainly there is no question about the seriousness of the matter raised by the hon. member for Fraser Valley East (Mr. Pringle).

Mr. Pepin: Has your research just arrived?

Mr. Stanfield: No; I have finally been able to obtain a copy of the motion. I imagine, that the hon. member who moved the motion did not expect it to be taken seriously and he had no copies. As I say, there is no question that this motion raises a very serious subject, and I am pleased that the members of the government have at least allowed one of their own supporters to get a motion before the House, though they blocked similar motions on two or three occasions earlier in the week.

As the hon. member pointed out, his motion does not strictly relate to transporting oil from Alaska, though I assume that the oil that will serve the Cherry Point refinery eventually will be transported along the tanker route from Alaska. If the hon. member for Fraser Valley East is intending to indicate that there is a spillage problem in Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, that is unquestionably the case. Clearly a good deal of oil is passing through those waters already, part of which goes to this particular refinery.

There is also no doubt at all about the importance of their being some joint control on the part of the government of the United States and the government of Canada over the movement of oil and other commodities in this area. I do not think anyone has to be a Solomon to say that. Neither do I think any member from British Columbia will dispute the importance of this kind of joint control being established. As it has been put to me, while we have adopted twentieth century technology in controlling the movement of aircraft, we are still using fifteenth, sixteenth or seventeenth century techniques at best in controlling the movement of vessels in and out of our ports. There is no doubt at all about the urgency of some rational plan or joint method of controlling the movement of vessels in these waters.

• (1500)

The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Secretary of State for External Affairs have stated also that the suggestion was made during President Nixon's visit that both governments should consider placing this matter in the hands of the International Joint Commission. That seems to me to be a rational approach. The International Joint Commission could take this matter a step forward with a view to fathering, if you like, a body with joint control over the movement of vessels in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Georgia Strait and Puget Sound. As far as