

Oil Pollution

Mr. Basford: You might learn something.

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am sure every member of the House welcomed the motion that is before us today, proposed by the hon. member for Fraser Valley East (Mr. Pringle). When he put that motion forward on a subject that we thought would command the full support of every member of the House, we felt there would be a disposition, as there had been in the past, to accept the motion, to get it approved and to transmit it immediately to Washington, where it was intended to show the full support this House has for the reference to the IJC, and to show also the expression of concern of all members of this House over the consequences of the oil spill on the Pacific coast.

Of course, the result of initiating debate unfortunately has been to change the allotted days, and this particularly affected the Social Credit party. I know this consequence was not in the mind of the member for Fraser Valley East, but it arose because of the insistence upon debating a proposition that I would have thought could have been passed, approved, and sent to Washington immediately, just as other motions of this kind had been dealt with when there was a unanimous feeling of the whole House. However, I should add that even though this has been unfortunate from the point of view of the proceedings of the House, as Secretary of State for External Affairs I rather welcome the views that have been expressed by various members, which show just how deep is the concern about the possible damage to the environment on the Pacific coast.

Many hon. members who have spoken have made very valid points. These, I am sure, will have come to the attention of the United States administration and will help to support the efforts that the government has been making to try to prevent further damage and to deal with crises when they arise. The concern that has been expressed in this House yesterday and today has been growing for several years. Canada has now had direct experience on both coasts of the damage that can be done by relatively small spills or by the wreck of relatively small tankers. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, if I may reply to the leader of the NDP, I think we probably know more, and have had more experience and done more effective work in clearing up oil spills than any other country in the world. Indeed, it is our experience that is serving as a model for many other countries. So, I deny the major premise of the leader of the NDP that Canada has been ineffective. This is simply not so.

Our legislation is a model for other countries, and more than that the action we have taken has served as a model. This is one of the reasons that at Stockholm today it is not only the eloquence of my colleague, the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Davis), nor the laws we have on our books, which are so progressive, but the effective action that has been taken by Canada in the whole field of the environment that has given us a position of leadership at that conference.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sharp: Everyone is aware that these incidents may be the foreshadowing of something far worse. The size of

modern tankers has seized the public's imagination. Some dramatic figures on the growth in the number and tonnage of supertankers were given to the House in the debate yesterday.

These tankers are already by far the largest vessels man has ever sent to sea, and all of us think with horror of what might happen if one of these enormous tankers were to break up on our coasts. This is a universal concern. It is not only ours alone. This is not anything that is nationalistic or parochial. We are expressing our concern on behalf of all the people of the world. Already these tankers are delivering massive quantities of oil through or near Canadian waters on both coasts. I understand the concern of the hon. member for Fraser Valley East and of others from British Columbia who have spoken in this debate, but we in the government, while we are concerned particularly about the movement of oil through these narrow waters, the Straits of Juan de Fuca, Georgia Strait and Puget Sound, recognize, as does the United States government, that there are other parts of our countries, of the United States and Canada, in which we are jointly concerned, where there could be the break up of a tanker that would cause great damage to the people of the area affected.

We all know that the demand for oil in North America is growing. We accept new refineries and new transportation routes for ever larger volumes of oil as the pattern of the present and the future. There is very little we will be able to do except to provide for moving that oil on the safest routes, and making provision for dealing with spills which will inevitably occur some time in the future. These are the lines upon which we must take practical action, and these are the lines upon which the government is taking practical action.

The statisticians have given us sober warning of just how often we must expect that this growth will bring trouble in its wake. It does not matter how many precautions are taken, inevitably there is going to be a break up somewhere. This has been the experience in the past; this will be our experience in the future.

Mr. Woolliams: Will the minister permit a question at this stage?

Mr. Sharp: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Woolliams: I appreciate the minister yielding the floor so that I may put a question. Has the minister or his government ever taken a position, previous to the United States decision to go ahead with TAPS and the tanker route, that we approved a pipeline in the Mackenzie delta area, down North America into western Canada, into the industrial sections of Canada and the United States? Have you got that far, and prepared an agreement for negotiation with the United States?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Macdonald) will be taking part in this debate. I hope the hon. member will stay around and hear what he has to say. He has taken very constructive action in a way that is responsible to the environmentalists of Canada, and that recognizes the problems that have emerged. Every day it seems we hear new threats to the environment. We are unceasingly