

Canada Shipping Act

I am aware that there are those who feel we should go even farther. Indeed I, as the head of the Canadian delegation at Brussels last November, advocated that there be unlimited liability with regard to oil spills of this sort. Unfortunately, the world community was not prepared to accept anything like this. I can say to them through you, Mr. Speaker, that the instant the world community comes around to agreeing on the magnitude of this problem and on the potential threat it poses to us all, Canada will not wish to act unilaterally but will be quite prepared to fall in line with whatever is achieved through international agreements.

We cannot wait around for another *Arrow* to sail its wobbly way up Chedabucto Bay; we cannot wait around while perhaps the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the St. Lawrence Seaway are polluted and find ourselves helpless and powerless as we were in many respects when the two major incidents as well as some smaller ones occurred this year. That is why, on an urgent basis, I have brought this legislation before the House. I believe it will commend itself to hon. members. I shall be more than pleased, as I said earlier, to deal with it in detail in committee. I have not the slightest doubt that it will be approved unanimously. When this legislation is coupled with the improvements in the Fisheries Act, which my colleague the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry (Mr. Davis) helped to bring forward, and when it is coupled with the Arctic bill which hon. members approved unanimously earlier this year and with other measures which will be taken within this area, we shall have devised within the short space of less than one year a comprehensive package which will ensure that our coastline and coastal waters are protected to the maximum degree that is humanly possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Is the hon. member for Comox-Alberni seeking the floor for the purpose of asking a question?

Mr. Barnett: Yes, Mr. Speaker. My question has to do with the fund. The minister did not clarify this in his remarks, and I ask my question because the matter is not clear from my reading of the bill. Perhaps I should put my question this way. If there were two or three major disasters close together, is it possible that the fund could operate on an overdraft basis, since the amount in the fund would be insufficient to cover all charges against it, in order that the people who needed to be helped may be compensated?

Mr. Jamieson: Mr. Speaker, I will be glad to answer the question. I can only hope that we will not, in a sense, enter the committee stage at this point because, the answers to any of the questions with regard to this measure will need to be fairly lengthy. To be specific about the question asked by the hon. member, I see no problem with regard to having the fund operate in an overdraft state or something of that nature. Indeed, we anticipate that from the outset there might perhaps be some government advance into the fund on a loan basis to ensure that it becomes operative. I will be glad to discuss this with the hon. member in committee.

[Mr. Jamieson.]

• (12:30 p.m.)

Mr. Barnett: That covers the situation.

Mr. Aiken: Before beginning my remarks, may I be permitted to ask the minister a question which I feel is important? In view of the fact that the legislation is being sent to the Special Committee on Environmental Pollution, does the government eventually intend to transfer the responsibility for this section of the Canada Shipping Act to the new department of environmental affairs?

Mr. Jamieson: No, Mr. Speaker. There is no such intention in the legal sense, but my colleague the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry (Mr. Davis) and I recognize the necessity of co-ordinated effort in this regard. The Canada Shipping Act has so many ramifications it is generally felt, and I think all hon. members will agree, that the Department of Transport has the greatest competence in this area. It involves the coastguard and this sort of thing. These provisions will remain the responsibility of the Department of Transport.

Mr. Lundrigan: A supplementary question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. It seems we are getting into the committee aspect of the discussion. The Chair will permit one further question.

Mr. Lundrigan: Can the minister indicate under whose purview will fall the matter of oil drilling and any spills that might occur?

Mr. Jamieson: Here again, Mr. Speaker, there is no short answer. In so far as this legislation is concerned, it does not concern itself with anything other than shipping. Because we have to use the Canada Shipping Act to establish where the liability lies, that question is not resolved in this measure. The Department of Energy, Mines and Resources licenses oil drills, etc., and something in their regulations covers this field. I plead with the hon. member to give me time so that when we get to committee I can then give the answers.

Mr. G. H. Aiken (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his brief explanation of the objectives of this bill. I assure him that we in the Progressive Conservative Party support the objectives of this bill absolutely.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Aiken: This bill is intended to reduce the dangers of pollution of our waters by ships and their cargoes. To this particular objective we are absolutely committed. I am sure the minister understands that any comments, criticisms or suggestions that may be made by my colleagues or myself will be directed solely toward strengthening the bill, making it workable and effective, and clearing up some of the obvious administrative difficulties with which the minister is faced.