

Transportation Accident Investigation Board

have an independent board or to deliver on its supposed promise concerning safety.

Mr. Robert E. Skelly (Comox—Alberni): Madam Speaker, I had originally not intended to take part in this debate. I thought rather that I would leave it up to others in our caucus who have more expertise and experience in the area of transportation safety. There is no question that the debate has been handled competently by my colleagues. It was only when the Hon. Member for Victoria (Mr. Brewin) and some other Members raised parts of the Bill relating to the power of the chairman of the Board to involve himself in a public inquiry if the Minister fails to do so under the Inquiries Act that I decided to participate.

When it was drawn to my attention by the Hon. Member for Victoria that the Bill also applies to marine incidents I felt compelled to address a number of issues around those parts of the Bill which I think are important.

• (1710)

We on this side of the House whose constituencies have been affected by the recent west Coast oil spills have had difficulty in persuading the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Bouchard) and other cabinet Ministers involved to strike a public inquiry into all aspects of the west coast oil spill that took place between December 1988 and January 1989. A public inquiry is desperately needed into a shipping incident off the West Coast which resulted in a tremendous amount of environmental damage, a tremendous amount of damage to my constituents in the fishing and aquaculture industry and in the tourist industry which will be affected by this spill both now and for some time to come.

This section of Bill C-2 gives us an additional opportunity where the Minister appears reluctant to strike an inquiry under the Inquiries Act to have the chairman of this safety Board take a look at the possibility of striking a public inquiry so that there can be full public involvement into accidents and damage which result from marine incidents.

I do not know why the Minister of the Environment feels so reluctant or so fearful of calling a public inquiry into the west coast oil spill. He knows, as most people on the West Coast and most people in this House know, that an in-house ministerial review is not sufficient to determine what the problems were with respect to the oil spill and what the causes were with respect to the caused the marine incident which ultimately resulted in oil spilling on to the oceans, crossing international boundaries, affecting Canadian waters and affecting the shores of Vancouver Island.

It is insufficient to have an internal ministerial inquiry to try to deal with all the causes of that problem and to deal with the adequacy of the response. What we have there is a case of the Ministry examining its own reaction to the oil spill. Needless to say there is concern on the part of the people of the West Coast of Vancouver Island that this is going to result in a cover-up, that adequate measures are not going to be taken, and that fault is not going to be placed where fault should be placed. Therefore we will not be able to react adequately to an oil spill in the future or to improve our reaction to such a spill in the future.

I welcome this provision in Bill C-2 to allow the chairman of the Board to strike an inquiry where he feels it is necessary and where the Minister has neglected to call an inquiry under the Inquiries Act. When I looked at the advantages of a public inquiry in this case, I cannot understand why the Minister of the Environment is so fearful of calling an inquiry. It simply does not make sense. We have the advantage of the volunteers who were the very first people on site when the oil came ashore on the west coast of Vancouver Island. They are not part of the current ministerial review, yet they have a great deal to say in a very informed way that would be helpful to the Ministry, to the Minister of the Environment and to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Bouchard) in their response to oil spills in the future. Those volunteers are excluded from the ministerial review, but they should be part of a full public inquiry into the incident which resulted in our West Coast being fouled by oil between December 1988 and January 1989. I cannot understand what the Minister has to fear from a full public inquiry into this incident.