

Oil Pollution

I should like to get back to the matter of the oil tanker route on the west coast, the problem which we are discussing now. For a year and a half our committee has been trying to obtain permission from the government to visit the west coast to look into this problem. The chairman of the committee was the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Anderson) who was recently elected leader of the provincial Liberal party in British Columbia. He moved a motion in this House. Some of the members of the cabinet disliked the manner in which it was raised, so the committee was denied the right to travel and investigate.

• (1650)

We tried to get a similar motion through the national resources committee, but it went the same way. Members of the cabinet collectively were not interested in having a committee of the House of Commons conduct a thorough investigation of the oil tanker route along the west coast. No one held up this motion except the cabinet ministers who are sitting in the chamber right now. We have every right to condemn them for the action they took last year.

I endorse the motion that is before the House, Mr. Speaker. I will be happy to see it forwarded to the International Joint Commission and I hope some action will result from it. However, just last week in answer to a question which I posed in the House, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) indicated that a letter he had written to his counterpart in the United States, suggesting joint action by the IJC on the west coast of Canada, had not been answered. I certainly hope we have more luck with this motion.

Mr. Basford: Let's pass it, then.

Mr. Harding: There are several other points I would like to make before I sit down. However, I know that a number of hon. members wish to take part in this debate. I believe that major changes must be made in our shipping act if we are to bring about the type of controls that I am sure most members of the House want. We should bar from Canadian ports any ships which cannot meet the standards on which we as Canadians insist, particularly if those ships are to travel waterways such as the St. Lawrence Seaway, the Straits of Juan de Fuca and the Strait of Georgia. If we do not do this, Canadians will be the losers in the long run. We will lose because of the immense ecological damage which is bound to be done to our coasts, to our fisheries, to our tourist industry and to the living which people enjoy in the coastal areas.

It is not as if these things had not been brought to the attention of the government. Here I wish to quote from a brief which was presented to the government and, I believe, to most members of this House in May, 1971, by the Canadian Scientific Society for Pollution and Environmental Control in British Columbia, which organization we call SPEC. Some interesting points are made in the brief. It deals with the size of tankers, and says:

The size of the tankers involved in this oil movement means that any mishap or spillage will be a catastrophe. A tanker such as the *Universe Ireland*—not necessarily the largest to be used—carries 300,000 tons. If this were spilled and washed up on shore it would make a blanket one inch thick, 30 feet wide and 3,000 miles long.

[Mr. Harding.]

This is the problem that we are worried about in British Columbia. With just one major mishap in 25 or 30 years there would be a catastrophe so far as the entire coastline is concerned. This is why we are pressing this issue and urging that every pressure be put on the United States to stop the shipment of oil through the Straits of Juan de Fuca. I quote further from the brief as follows:

In an affidavit prepared in March, 1970, Mr. J. T. Galvin, co-author of the well known book on Pacific marine life, "Between Pacific Tides," said this about the effects of a spill from this tanker traffic:

"The effect of the oil spills which must be expected as a result of the proposed pipeline tanker operation will be grim. Oil spilled at Prince William Sound or at sea in that area will be carried down the coast by the Japanese Current, perhaps having its major effect in the first thousand miles, but certainly making a major contribution to the fouling of the shoreline all the way to Point Conception in California, where the Japanese Current swings seaward away from the coast.

"Not only will the oil move down the coast with the ocean current, but it will be carried by the flowing and ebbing tides into every bay, inlet and salt lagoon. And in the cold waters of the North Pacific oil degrades very slowly. In short, the effect of the inevitable spills will be catastrophic and irreversible.

This organization, SPEC, made a number of recommendations. However, it seems to me that the government has totally ignored this top-notch environmental organization which has done so much work in this field. For that reason I think the government should be condemned. I quote again from the brief:

Because of our great concern for the damage to our environment which is sure to result from present plans for increased tanker traffic along the west coast of Canada, and the various proposals for pipe lines in the Arctic, we urge:

1. The Canadian government holds hearings in western Canada regarding the proposed tanker/pipeline movement of oil, so that Canadians in the area most directly affected will be able to make their views known to the government.

That recommendation was ignored last year. I have already indicated the trouble we had in trying to get a committee out to the west coast. Yesterday I moved a motion asking that the external affairs committee go out to investigate the present Cherry Point oil spill. That motion was turned down. SPEC also recommended as follows:

That a joint Canadian/United States committee be appointed to hold hearings and to report to our governments on the many aspects of transporting oil from the Arctic which are still matters of controversy. The committee should have at least five members from each of our countries, and these five would include an economist, an engineer, a lawyer and a representative of a conservation/anti-pollution group.

We believe that most of the decisions concerning the Trans-Alaska pipeline were made in haste, or from a narrow point of view. They have not properly considered long-term effects on economics, petroleum usage and markets, or environmental damage, and we fear that these long-term decisions are being made in haste, under both political and economic pressure.

• (1700)

We suggest that a committee embracing both Canadians and Americans be appointed to hold public hearings, to publish their recommendations, and to open to public debate and consideration the many aspects of the development of the northern petroleum resources. This committee should also have conducted a thorough study of the ecological effects of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline route.