

Oil Pollution

connection with this spill. I assume that his statement was not ready in time for him to follow the usual courtesy of making copies available to the opposition. I do not know just what provoked this statement at this time.

As the minister has indicated, while compensation is important it is not the most important question. What the country really wants to know is how the government of Canada intends to achieve joint control over what may happen in the waters off that part of Canada and the adjoining waters of the United States.

I do not wish to be partisan in replying to a statement on motions or to provoke any kind of controversy, but I do say to the Secretary of State for External Affairs and to the Prime Minister, first of all, that the government took an interest in this problem very late in the day and that the planning of the Alyeska route was very far advanced before the government showed any interest or concern. It is only within recent times that the government of Canada has taken any direct position. Second, the government of Canada has been tardy in pursuing its investigation of any route that would be an alternative to the coastal route for transporting Alaska oil. It moved very late in the day and even now it is not in a position to know what it might do in that connection.

I simply say that, while it is all very well for the Secretary of State for External Affairs to make a statement in the House, while it is all very well for him to tell us that our ambassador in Washington is pressing this matter, it seems to me, in view of the importance of the subject and the dangers to which the minister himself has referred, that this matter should be pursued at the highest level between the government of Canada and the government of the United States. The people of Canada will be satisfied with nothing less.

Mr. Barry Mather (Surrey-White Rock): Mr. Speaker, as the member for the area affected by what has happened at Cherry Point I have a particular interest in speaking on this matter. First of all, I want to thank the minister for his statement. It is true that it outlines what the government has done rather than what it has not done. In my view the government could have and should have done a good deal more than it did to stop what has happened.

I think we should understand that as long as ships carry Alaska oil along the British Columbia coast to the refinery at Cherry Point, which is about 15 or 16 miles from my riding, as long as that plan continues and as long as that refinery exists for the purpose of refining that oil, we have in effect an ecological time bomb within a few miles of our shores. It is true that we should take protective measures against what has happened, and in my view the protective measures taken by the Canadian government were insufficient. After the spill took place, during the night there were 200 people with bales of hay trying to keep the oil off the beaches at Cherry Point and White Rock. With what was already known as to the likely effects if such a spill should take place, surely the government could have been in a better position to protect our people. In my opinion the contingency measures were not effective and were not properly prepared. What the government has said is all right as far as it goes, but the measures which the government is taking do not go far enough.

[Mr. Stanfield.]

I think we have to realize that what the Americans are planning to do with regard to shipping oil along the British Columbia coast constitutes in effect an unfriendly act by one nation against another. We have to take that position on our own behalf and also on behalf of the Americans in the adjacent Pacific coast area. We are in fact faced with a most basic and serious situation involving pollution of the ecology in which tragedies and disasters far greater than this small spill will inevitably occur. The government's own research has established that over a period of every three or four years there is bound to be a major oil spill if these giant tankers are allowed to sail down the coast.

I draw the attention of the government to a report issued today through the office of the Minister of Transport on a study prepared by Queen's University in regard to the feasibility of transporting Alaska oil by railway from the north to the south. According to the study, it is feasible to build a railway from the north and ship over that line at least 200 million barrels of oil in a comparable period as opposed to shipment by water.

I cannot emphasize too much that we in this party, and the people of British Columbia, I am sure, regardless of their party affiliation, look to the government to take stronger and tougher measures than they have taken and to point out to the Americans, many of whom will agree with us, that the planned route for the shipment of Alaska oil will result in the degradation of our coast.

• (1420)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, first we deeply regret—and we will never say it too often—that when the minister makes statements in the House, he informs hon. members only a few minutes ahead of time.

As to the content of his statement, it is nothing more than a stuttering which could not in any way solve the problem of pollution and protection of the environment in Canada.

The minister announced that a certain compensation would be paid, but that is a matter of very little importance as compared with the whole problem. It is again a kind of band aid treatment which will definitely not ease the pain. All that question can boil down to the nature of our relationship with our neighbour, the United States. The Canadian government has always had a shy and hesitant stand by always placing itself at the mercy of the United States as far as the protection of the environment and the fight against pollution in Canada are concerned.

The subject of particular concern to the House today, specifically the shipping of oil along our seacoast, is part of this problem.

We are led to believe that our ambassador in Washington is exerting pressures, but the problem still exists in Canada, and the minister is stuttering something or other about this problem instead of speaking up.

We urge the government to speak loud and clear to the Americans and suggest to them that, while they want to protect their own environment, their country and resources in order to develop them, we too, as Canadians, are proud of our country, and we shall take the necessary