

Oral Questions

PROCESSING OF RESOLUTION THROUGH BRITISH PARLIAMENT

Hon. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Madam Speaker, my spontaneous question is also for the Right Hon. Prime Minister, but first I would inform my colleagues that the print is so small that I will have to use my glasses to read it!

Was the Prime Minister informed by Mr. Pym that any judicial challenges to the constitutional resolution might well be crucial with respect to the processing of the resolution through the British Parliament with the charter of rights attached? That is a specific question and I would invite the right hon. gentleman to give as concise an answer as possible.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, until now the questions asked have been with regard to what I told Mr. Pym or what I told Mrs. Thatcher and so on. I repeat, I hesitate to tell the House what Mr. Pym told me. If Mr. Pym wishes to say publicly anything which he told me, then I will release him from any secret to which he may think that he is bound. But it is not entirely proper for me to be the spokesman for Mr. Pym. If the hon. member insists and ask his question a second time, then I will assume that I must answer.

Mr. Fraser: Madam Speaker, this sudden concern or sensitivity for the conventions and proprieties with regard to the Constitution comes as a welcome surprise to us all.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Fraser: No doubt the right hon. gentleman will find the proper occasion to inform the press with tongue in cheek of exactly what Mr. Pym said. Did the Prime Minister express the view to Mr. Pym that there would be many more challenges to the resolution following the challenges presently before the courts? Would the Prime Minister, despite his sensitivity to convention, let us know the answer to that question?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, the hon. member talks about my sudden concern for constitutional proprieties. This is not a constitutional propriety; it is a rule which I have adopted since I became Prime Minister and the press knows that well. When asked about a private meeting, or about a federal-provincial conference held in private, I am generally quite free in saying what I say, unless it is agreed that the conversations would not be revealed.

Mr. Fraser: Tongue in cheek.

Mr. Trudeau: But I have rarely broken the rule of revealing what somebody else has said.

Mr. Fraser: Just the version of what you said.

Mr. Trudeau: In these cases, I always refer the press to somebody else. If somebody else, either directly or indirectly, has informed the hon. member of what was said and the hon. member is asking about what was said, I repeat, I would want to make sure that that person does not mind the comments

being repeated. If Mr. Pym or Mrs. Thatcher wish to make their position clear, then it is up to them to do so.

Mr. Fraser: Perhaps you would like an adjournment.

Mr. Trudeau: No. However, even with the help of my glasses, I cannot remember the end of the hon. member's question. Perhaps, Madam Speaker, you would allow the hon. member to ask his question again.

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FISHERIES

INDUSTRY AND LABOUR ADJUSTMENT PROGRAM—INQUIRY
RESPECTING ASSISTANCE TO FISHERMEN

Mr. Ted Miller (Nanaimo-Alberni): Madam Speaker, I direct my question to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. It relates to the announcement made on January 19 with regard to the industry and labour adjustment program. In recognition of the serious difficulties in the auto industry and the anticipation of other difficulties arising throughout Canada, does the minister anticipate that some of the money allotted to that program will be provided to retrain fishermen who own vessels and shore workers in the fishing industry of British Columbia who, due to serious financial difficulties, are being driven out of the industry? Could the minister find some means by which a portion of those funds could be allocated to the British Columbia fishing industry in order to alleviate some of the difficulties there?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, the committee of deputy ministers assigned the responsibility of developing the criteria upon which the program would be implemented is presently at work. I will take the hon. member's reference to the problems faced by some of the communities in the fishing industry, refer it to the committee and ask it to determine whether these problems are applicable under the criteria being developed.

Mr. Miller: My supplementary question is to the same minister. The minister has received representations from various fishermen's groups and probably also from individuals and Members of Parliament, particularly those on this side of the House. These questions are in regard to the serious difficulties that fishermen encounter in becoming eligible for UIC payments and the difficulties that those who are eligible to collect encounter in obtaining the benefits. People wait eight, ten or 12 weeks for benefits that they are legitimately entitled to.

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I should like to ask the minister if his department has determined any mechanism by which they can streamline the method of dealing with the claims of fishermen, and in order to alleviate some of the workload in fishing communities that make claims, can some mechanism be established to train additional agents so that claimants can receive what is due to them immediately?