

Continental Shelf Boundary

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Mr. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I want to point out how unfortunate it is that the excellent remarks of the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) have not been listened to by more than one supporter in the official opposition, and for several minutes during his excellent remarks there was no one in his place except the hon. member himself.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Paproski: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that is a point of order. There are committees sitting at this time.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): That's a good point of order; a very good point.

Mr. Paproski: If this is the kind of game the government wants to play, we are prepared to play the same type of game.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): What game? There is no game.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must say I agree with the hon. member for Edmonton Centre (Mr. Paproski) that this is not a point of order, and I think it does not help the debate in any way.

Mr. Marshall: Mr. Speaker, I have as many good friends on that side as I have on this side, and I am sure they are listening.

An hon. Member: Even more.

Mr. Marshall: We have our friends to the left who are listening.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): That is what counts.

Mr. Marshall: Mr. Speaker, I was saying that I think it is worth while mentioning that I visited a new, massive fish plant which to my mind would put to shame anything I have seen in the Atlantic region. The plant has a capacity of 500,000 cubic feet and two air-blast freezing tunnels of 10 or 12 metric tons per day each. The warehouse has been granted duty free status; that is no duty is paid on goods brought in for freezing and/or storage and subsequently shipped out of the islands.

It was obvious to me that even though the fishery has been declining, new, modern vessels are being added to the fleet from France. Similarly, only one small section of the plant was being utilized. One does not have to be too imaginative to conclude that expansion of the industry is seriously being considered, perhaps by agreement with other nations, to process their catches there. I think I should mention too, Mr. Speaker, that during my visit I was received by the commissioner and was shown every courtesy, even to the use of his official chauffeur-driven vehicle with the head of tourism as a guide while I visited the various points of interest.

● (1710)

I must say, too, that Canada has many friends amongst the population, and I noticed with pride that even a few Canadian flags were flying. However, Mr. Speaker, I feel very strongly about this matter and I say to all members of this House who are showing an interest in Canada's impending declaration to extend her limits that the existence of this little, minuscule blob of land could cause serious complications to Canada's position. Indeed, as I see it, St. Pierre, on behalf of France, could extend her limits to 200 miles and claim, as I indicated before, and is claiming, ownership of the mineral resources of about 20,000 square miles and can base its claim under the 1958 Geneva convention which, by article 6, established the doctrine of equidistance.

France claims equidistance between Burin and St. Pierre, a distance of 14 miles. Canada feels, and rightfully so, that the equidistance line should be drawn between Little Green Island and St. Pierre, a distance of three miles. While I realize that the situation may be delicate, I am sure, through the good relations that exist between Canada and France, that mutually acceptable agreements can be worked out. But, Mr. Speaker, the stakes are high, not only because of the valuable resources that exist, the ownership of which must be decided upon, but also because of my province's involvement, its claims against those resources and ownership and its rights as part of Canada.

I ask the obvious question: In the ongoing negotiations with France, that are now taking place, is the province of Newfoundland, whose economic future is vital to the extension of Canada's limits, and whose stakes are high in the determination of ownership of the resources off its coasts, being consulted in the ongoing negotiations between Canada and France; and if not, why not? Just what is the position of Canada vis-à-vis St. Pierre-Miquelon when she extends her limits to 200 miles or to the continental shelf?

I feel very strongly, however, that a most important matter becomes vital and necessary at this time; that is, Canada should be thinking seriously of making a proposal to France with the objective of acquiring the French islands on some mutually agreed basis. In this way Canada could solidify her sovereignty and certainly tidy up the precarious and continuing controversy which will persist over the years over ownership rights involving the two countries as well as the province of Newfoundland. Certainly, a feasibility study could be carried out on the social and economic benefits which would result, and the surrounding factors. While some might consider this a delicate proposal, I feel it is time that Canada asserted her historic rights to correct the mistakes made when the islands were ceded to France by Britain in 1763; and we must assert our position due to historic changes that have taken place in the 213 years that have elapsed. I feel that France would, or should, consider such a proposal seriously.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would welcome participation by my colleagues. I know they will support my motion for production of papers so that parliament can look into all the factors pertinent to a declaration of Canada's position vis-à-vis the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon.