

Supply

North America, the coastal waters and beyond North America, the fishery around Newfoundland, has been famous for centuries. The Europeans had fished their territory out. John Cabot carried out exploration for the fishermen of the west country of England. There was the arrival of fishermen from all up and down the western coast of Europe, from Spain and Portugal to the Basque territories of France and the port cities of France and England. The fishery off the North American coast has been one of the great fisheries of the world. The French interest in that is clear and long-established.

Now, of course, the changes that have occurred in terms of the extension of boundaries out to 200 miles, as well as the establishment of responsibility under international treaties, the situation of these islands and the French claims to them have been clearly put in contention. The reorganization of the fishery and the determination of what France's rights should be in this new situation were something that should have been dealt with about the time that the situation of the Channel Islands was dealt with. Surely the Canadian Government of that time should have been in consultation with the British Government. We can always look back to our days in the Empire and our continuing ties with the Commonwealth, even with the British involvement and the European Economic Community which reduces our ties with Britain in many ways. Surely that was the time to say to the British Government: "Let's be sure that when you settle the rights of the Channel Islands and British subjects out there close to France, let's make sure that at the same time we take care to settle the rights of France near the coast of Canada, right off the Island of Newfoundland, in a very similar way". It can only be profoundly regretted that the settlement that was arrived at there is not to be regarded as a precedent.

If it is not possible for Canada to go to France directly and to say that that is a precedent upon which we should settle, then what can be done is to say to an arbitrator: "The resolution that was arrived at for the Channel Islands indicates how these matters need to be resolved. We do not ask you to make it a precedent. We just ask you to contemplate the situation in the gulf and around St. Pierre and Miquelon. As far as French rights are concerned there, treat them in a similar way". That is all that is wanted.

It seems to me, and lawyers may protest, that this is an attempt to prevent something from being a precedent. However, if it is a sound resolution, then how can the French deny that the settlement there was not a sound one? It was one that they wanted. It seems to me that one does not have to concede very much to that particular kind of legalese in pressing the point.

Mr. Siddon: You assume that it is a reasonable world.

Mr. Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): The Minister says that it is a reasonable world—

Mr. Siddon: You're assuming that.

Mr. Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): I want to get to the ways in which it is not a reasonable world. I have been talking about the way in which the Secretary of State has faced up to some situations that were not reasonable.

Surely, in thinking about this situation we have to consider what happened in January of 1987. An agreement was made which indicates how unreasonable the world can be and how unwise the Government of Canada was at the time. It arrived at an agreement which it was hoped would quiet down the French and take care of things. It was an agreement that gave the French some rights. In fact, it gave them unspecified access to the northern cod stock in another area off northeast Newfoundland, the 2J3KL zone. To arrive at that kind of agreement without having consulted with the Government of Newfoundland was an incredible piece of irrational behaviour. It was not reasonable to do that.

A good deal of the difficulties that the Government got into politically resulted from that particular failure to consult with the Government of Newfoundland. This particular grant of fishing rights is short of what is actually required, which is a resolution of the boundaries question. It is not enough to buy the happiness of the French by giving them some fishing rights. What we want to do is to settle the matter.

● (1350)

It is worth recognizing that the reaction or fire-storm of protest that broke out in Newfoundland when that agreement came to public attention has reverberated very far through the halls of Canadian power. As a matter of fact, if one looks at the constitutional Accord arrived at at Meech Lake, and considered further at the Langevin Building last spring, the proviso is that in perpetuity the fishery be a topic for discussion at constitutional conferences, of all places. This is evidence of how badly and irrationally the Conservative Government of the day acted in arriving at some type of concession to the French without properly dealing with the Government of Newfoundland.

It is not surprising that late last fall the Premier of Newfoundland apparently considered getting out of politics when he noted that type of behaviour on the part of his federal friends. They were not even people from another Party. When Manitoba got shafted by the Government on important decisions such as the CF-18 contract, Premier Pawley could always think it was partisan, that the Manitoba New Democratic Government did not matter a whit to the Conservative Government of Canada. But for the Conservative Premier of Newfoundland to experience that type of behaviour from a Government of his own stripe was surely cause for the outrage that he expressed, which continued for months, and also the type of outrage expressed by the people of Newfoundland.

What is clearly required is to find the means of bringing the French to arbitration. What we did today in Question Period is attempt to find the means and to suggest the means to Government to do this.