

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has made it very clear that the government by its actions believes there is a serious crisis in the Atlantic fishery. We are dealing with that problem.

The member makes the distinction between old money and new money. That might make sense to him but it does not make much sense to the people in Atlantic Canada who were the beneficiaries of the expenditure of some \$130 million by this government in response to some of the problems that are part of the Atlantic provinces' fishing crisis.

With respect to Atlantic Canada generally, he need not take my word for the track record of this government on this matter. Liberal Premier Frank McKenna, of his province of New Brunswick, has said that ACOA, created by a Conservative government, is perhaps the best tool for regional development and diversification ever seen in Atlantic Canada.

That is part of the response of the government to ensure that Atlantic Canadians can play a full and equal—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. members: Order!

Mr. Fernand Robichaud (Beauséjour): Mr. Speaker, I remind the minister that Premier McKenna is a Liberal premier who cares a lot about people, which is a lot more than the government does for Atlantic Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in response to a question by the hon. member for Cape Breton—Highlands—Canso, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans tried to evade the issue of community quotas.

Canadians in the Atlantic region want to know whether the minister will exercise his authority and let communities like Canso keep their trawlers to maintain their fishing capacity until such time as the fish stocks return.

The government must choose between the survival of these communities or company profits. The fate of Canso will be that of all other fishing communities on the Atlantic coast. I ask the government and this minister: Whose side are they on?

[English]

Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, the government is very much on the side of the people, fishermen, plant workers and residents of the communities of Atlantic Canada.

The government is committed to the survival of these communities. That is why the minister responsible for ACOA and I have just come from a meeting with Mayor Ray White and a delegation from the community of Canso. We are exploring every viable option with the community of Canso and all Atlantic Canada communities so they can have a bright, prosperous and secure future.

Hon. Roger C. Simmons (Burin—St. George's): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Prime Minister, I would like to address a question to my good friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

Yesterday I was in St. John's to attend a meeting convened by the Federation of Labour and Municipalities to deal with the mounting crisis in the offshore and inshore fisheries in that province. The consensus shared by plant workers, fishermen, community leaders, labour leaders, politicians of all stripes, including three of his friends from the Senate of Canada, overwhelmingly agreed that fish plant closures are not the solution to the current problem. There was another consensus, too, that the Prime Minister has not yet seized with the urgency of this important issue.

Will the government and the Prime Minister undertake to meet with the organizers of yesterday's meeting with a view to keeping those inshore and offshore plants open until such time as the stocks rebuild?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, if the closings of fish plants are not the solution to the problem, I hope the hon. member will deliver a message to Premier Wells of Newfoundland who has clearly and explicitly stated that the fish plants involved in Newfoundland are going to be closing next year and that there is no alternative to their closing. His policy is that these plants have to close, although the government provided some assistance to see that the notice period was extended from three months by an additional year. The clear policy of the Government of Newfoundland, led by the hon. gentleman's friend Premier Wells, is that the fish plants have to close because