

S.O. 29

The issue before us tonight is a very difficult and complex issue. For a number of years, governments have tried to resolve this issue with no degree of success. Acting in good faith, the Government has made a bold attempt to resolve this issue in the best interests of Canadians, and in particular in the best interests of Newfoundlanders. That attempt has generated a great degree of apprehension and controversy within my province. I very much regret that.

When the people of Burin—St. George's elected me, they gave me a trust on their behalf to protect the livelihood of their fishery. The events of the past few days have been very difficult for me, and for those people who have put trust in me. They are asking the question why. This agreement struck between the Government of Canada and the Government of France is found to be unacceptable in certain respects by the people of the province, and in some respects it is unacceptable to me.

Before I get into any great detail on this item of controversy, I wish to remind the House why the Government of Canada entered into these negotiations. We do indeed have a serious and deteriorating situation with respect to the French claims and subsequent overfishing in the area known as 3PS. Incidentally, this area lies directly south of my riding. It is an area which contains fish stocks that are very important to the fishing industry, particularly the inshore fishing industry of the riding of Burin—St. George's, and more particularly the area of Fortune Bay and the Burin Peninsula.

There have been ongoing negotiations since 1977 between the two jurisdictions of Canada and France. Those negotiations have been over the claims made by both countries as to which country owns the waters off the south coast of Newfoundland surrounding the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. The negotiations have centred around where the boundary should lie. That has been going on since 1977 and we have come nine years into that process. We recognize at this point in our history that we have not been able to successfully negotiate a boundary settlement that is acceptable to the Province of Newfoundland, the Government of Canada, or the Government of France. The negotiated boundary is not possible. In these negotiations, the French have insisted on a very large area of jurisdiction for the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. That position is totally unacceptable to Canada. We are at the stage where we recognize that these negotiations will not be acceptable. The only way to resolve this dispute is by reference to an international judicial tribunal. The need for the determination of this boundary has become far more serious in recent years because of the overfishing effort conducted by the French in the area known as 3PS.

● (2320)

Taking advantage of the fact that we do not have a negotiated settlement, the French have engaged in a massive overfishing effort in this zone. We have heard all kinds of numbers being put forward. The Canadian Government acknowledges the French right to fish in that zone with a quota of some

6,400 metric tons of cod. Last year the French caught 26,000 tonnes of cod. This year they have made it known to various people in Canada that they intend to ignore the quota set for them and indeed will catch some 25,000 metric tons. In fact, I would suggest that the 25,000 metric tons which are being tossed around is a minimum and that it might be more like 40,000 metric tons before the year has ended. That is a totally unacceptable situation in which we find ourselves.

What is the solution? I would hope some members of the New Democratic Party were speaking in jest when they suggested that we send gunboats out there. What a position to advocate! It is one that is totally unacceptable to most rational Canadians.

The reality we must face is that we are into a situation where we have a very rich resource in an area known as 3PS or St. Pierre Bank, and it is rapidly being depleted by overfishing by a foreign country. Because it is an area of dispute, we have no control over this effort by the French Government.

How do we gain control over this very difficult and unacceptable situation? As I said, the only obvious solution to anyone who has studied the situation and has some knowledge of it is that we must obtain a ruling through the World Court. That presents another problem. The only way to accomplish that is if both parties to the dispute agree to make that reference. Canada has agreed in the interests of conservation, of Newfoundlanders, and of the long-term stability of the fishing industry of that province. However, the French have been very difficult on this issue. Essentially, if we want to call a spade a spade, they have been attempting to hold the Government to ransom.

This brings us to the events of the last few days. In its wisdom the Canadian Government decided to enter into negotiations on how we could resolve this boundary dispute by agreeing on a course of action. That course of action resulted in an agreement this past weekend which gives me some cause for concern. I am not disputing the objective of the agreement. I have no quarrel with what it attempts to do. It is attempting to do something which every Member of the House should be willing to support. However, I must ask a question about the agreement—are we putting ourselves in a position of paying too high a price to get this dispute before the courts? That is my basic concern.

I feel that the agreement provides the opportunity to pay too high a price. I am somewhat disappointed and probably disillusioned with the process by which this agreement came about over the weekend. Until some time last week I think the whole process was on track, but from my perspective the events of last weekend got out of hand and the subsequent criticism has taken away from what good this agreement might have been able to do.

While this issue affects other provinces, its primary focus is that of Newfoundland. I think it is a case of bad judgment on the part of the federal Government to not have had representatives of the Government of Newfoundland present during the