

Oral Questions

As the Prime Minister of all Canadians, will he now intervene personally in a crisis that is growing? Will he intervene to make sure that Atlantic Canadians, in the worst crisis in our history, are treated with fairness and generosity?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's scorn for whatever is being proposed by National Sea in St. John's today is surely premature since at the present time National Sea officials are meeting with the Premier of Newfoundland and with representatives of the workers to discuss just what it is they are proposing.

It has been suggested in the press, and I think there is some validity to it, that they are prepared to start a new processing operation in their fish plant at St. John's which would not involve groundfish but another operation that would involve keeping some several hundred people employed on a permanent basis, not the full compliment of the plant at the moment.

The hon. gentleman knows that the problem is with the resource, that there is not sufficient fish for all these processing plants to process. National Sea is obviously making an attempt to do what it can for as many of the employees as it can. It would be premature to comment further until we know exactly what is proposed and until the workers know and take a balanced look at what has been suggested.

Hon. William Rompkey (Labrador): Mr. Speaker, it may be premature and there may not be enough fish, but there clearly is enough money.

On Monday the Deputy Prime Minister said that Canadian farmers had received \$21 billion, I believe, from the government of Canada over five years. The fishermen of Atlantic Canada have received \$130 million—no new money—after months of the worst crisis in our history. There may not be enough fish, but where is the aid package and where is the billion dollars that was promised to Atlantic fishermen and plant workers?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the hon. gentleman is quoting the Deputy Prime Minister accurately, but certainly there has been very considerable assistance for farmers from this government. There has

been very considerable assistance for fishermen from this government, and there will be more.

When comparisons are being made as to what has been done for farmers as compared to fishermen, the hon. gentleman might remember that farmers are not eligible to receive unemployment insurance assistance, while fishermen are. Many hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent every year in assistance to fishermen through the unemployment insurance scheme and hundreds of millions more through the Department of Fisheries.

There will be whatever assistance is reasonably required to assist the Atlantic Canada fishing industry. The Prime Minister and this government will see it is received.

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, what fishing communities throughout Atlantic Canada expected from National Sea Products and from this government was a life raft to help them while fish stocks were rebuilt. What they got instead was a slap in the face.

I want to ask this government what it intends to do to see to it that more than 150 out of 800 fishworkers in Canso are given some sort of future. Just 150 out of 800 is absolutely unacceptable.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, this comes from a member who during his leadership campaign advocated that ACOA be disposed of.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacKay: Some of these advocates from the New Democratic Party purport to stand for working people. The only way you would ever see a callous on their hands is if it was a transplant.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacKay: In terms of what this government has done for Canso and for fishermen, let me remind my hon. colleague that when the party opposite was in government, it spent an average of \$185 million per year on regional development, period. Already this government has announced \$130 million in fisheries aid alone and, as my colleague has said, it is only an initial response.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!