

Small Businesses Loans Act

This is typical of the Government's hypocrisy. While cutting back on fishermen, the Government and its Ministers spend freely on their self-promotion. To add insult to injury, the other Minister of Fisheries had to pick up half the cost of the public campaign of the Minister of Transport. We seem to have many ministers of fisheries in this House. We often think, will the real Minister of Fisheries and Oceans please stand up?

Under this Bill the Fishermen's Insurance Loan Program is being taken out of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and given over to small business under the auspices of a new Minister who has no control whatsoever over management of the fishery. A fisherman who now gets into trouble because of climatic conditions, or poor fishing seasons, or whatever, will not be able to go to his own Minister, the Minister who should be responsible for him. This Bill is the final nail in the coffin for fishermen as it relates to their Department of Fisheries and their Minister.

In looking at some research I did with respect to the Fisheries Improvement Loans Act, in 1980, I found out what the present Minister of Fisheries, who was then a critic of fisheries, said at that time. He said that he would like to offer some observations on Bill C-28, which was the Bill to extend the Fisheries Improvement Loans Act. He then said:

Of course my criticism is always positive. We think that the Fisheries Improvement Loans Act has been a relatively successful program. It is the kind of program that puts the burden of initiative upon the fishermen themselves. We commend the proposal in this legislation which will increase the ceiling in terms of individual loans. It will extend the repayment period from 10 to 15 years, and it will create a ceiling on loans over the next three-year period of \$250 million.

The Bill which is before us does the opposite. This Bill ignores the ceiling for individual fishermen. It reduces the ceiling from \$150,000 to \$100,000. Something less than 10 per cent of fishermen have loans over \$100,000. However, I must point out to the Government and to the Minister of State for Small Businesses (Mr. Valcourt) that with the growing costs of fishing enterprises, boats, gear, and so on, these costs are increasing annually. One cannot set up much of a fishing enterprise even as an inshore fisherman for under \$150,000. Of course, the term of repayment has been brought down from 15 years, which was the case under FILA, to 10 years.

• (1300)

Once we go into Committee of the Whole on this Bill, it is my intention to ask the Minister of State for Small Businesses and Tourism (Mr. Valcourt) to accept an amendment that will reinstate the ceiling of \$150,000 for loans. Given that there is a cap of \$2.5 billion for small businesses, I am sure that this amendment would not cause any problems. I feel confident that the Minister could accept that amendment. It would in fact be an improvement to the Bill. Also, I would ask that he accept an amendment extending the term from 10 years, as it is under the Small Businesses Loans Act, to the 15 years that was available under FILA.

Those two amendments would go a long way toward making this Bill more acceptable to those of us in the Opposition, particularly those of us who represent fishing communities.

My criticism of the way in which the Government is treating fishermen goes further. I have already mentioned some of the programs that have been cut, slashed. One of the main programs on which this Government has backed off in terms of financing is the Small Craft Harbours Program.

I know the Hon. Minister had occasion recently to visit Val Comeau and during that visit the fishermen gave him a very hard time—and rightfully so. There is not nearly enough money in the Small Craft Harbours Program. This year, the funding amounts to \$47 million.

The Fisheries and Oceans Committee, for the last three years, has been asking this Government to put much more funding into small craft harbours. My colleague from the New Democratic Party who sits on that committee will know exactly what I am talking about. There was unanimous agreement on the part of the Fisheries and Oceans Committee that much more money is required for small craft harbours.

The Deputy Minister of Fisheries told the committee that if there was no more funding that there would be 150 wharfs and harbours closed in this country, 13 of which would be in my own Province of Prince Edward Island.

That is a sad commentary on this Government and how it is behaving toward the fishermen of this country.

I go back again to the Canada-France agreement, in which we have almost every Department of Government involved but for the Department of Fisheries. It is the Department of Fisheries that should be representing the views of the fishermen of this country in respect of that agreement. In External Affairs, the left hand never knows what the right hand is doing. The Minister, who should be responsible for dealing with fishermen and the concerns of fishermen, the one who should be standing up for the fishermen of this country, has let that slip out of his hands.

An article in one of today's newspapers makes the point that we are witnessing the disintegration of the Department of Regional Industrial Expansion.

Since the coming into power of this Government, the Department of Fisheries has been downgraded to the point of being almost a branch Department.

Yes, the Minister does have a car, and he does have a driver; but very little else. This Minister of Fisheries is not standing up in Cabinet for the rights of the fishermen of this country.

On the West Coast, we have the issue of Kemano, where they are talking once again about lowering water levels. Once again, the Minister is not standing up for the fishermen on the West Coast.