

Oral Questions

elected chairman of the Standing Committee on Transport to have this House of Commons—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would appreciate it if the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition would ask his question.

Mr. Clark: My question to the Minister of Transport, who has gagged the Canadian public and is now gagging this Parliament, is this: why did the Minister of Transport refuse that reference, and what is the Minister of Transport afraid of in letting the people of Canada examine in public hearings, either under the CTC or this House of Commons, the facts on which he purports to base the disruption of 19 per cent of rail passenger service in this country?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, obviously I cannot accept the premise which was used by the Leader of the Opposition. I did not go around the law. He must realize that the law says that the government is entitled to do what it is doing.

An hon. Member: It has never been done before.

Mr. Pepin: I caught the Leader of the Opposition flat-footed the other day because he was saying that the government was violating the law. The law is there. Did you read Section 64?

Mr. Clark: Yes.

Mr. Pepin: I did not go around the law. That is clear.

An hon. Member: How about answering the question?

Mr. Pepin: With respect to those facts pertaining to VIA, they have been debated at least since 1976.

An hon. Member: Not true.

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Lang had a reference to the CTC at that time. All these routes we are talking about now have been thoroughly investigated throughout the last three or four years. The subject is very well known. What is needed is a decision. The opposition is using every trick of the trade to prevent a decision. That is what I object to.

With respect to the reference to the Standing Committee on Transport, I have said repeatedly here in the House that I was willing to go to the committee to provide all possible information. It should be obvious to everyone here that what the opposition is trying to do is obtain a reference so that a report can be written and so that they will have another kick at the can. It is the seventh trick they are using now in order to delay.

● (1440)

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Madam Speaker: Order. I can see that the only thing that will happen today is that there will be fewer questioners. I urge hon. members on both sides to be brief.

The hon. member for St. John's West, for a good start.

FISHERIES

CLOSURE OF FISH PLANTS IN NEWFOUNDLAND

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Madam Speaker, they have been kneecapped over there.

My question is directed to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. The minister will know that the Newfoundland fishing industry is in a crisis, that seven of the major fish plants in Grand Bank, Fortune, Gaultois, Ramea, Burgeo and my own district of St. John's have been closed now since the end of August and that the Lake Group, the second largest Newfoundland company, is in the hands of its bankers. Thousands of fishermen have been unemployed for some time, as have thousands of plant workers and half the trawler fleet.

The minister has said repeatedly that he has constitutional jurisdiction over the fishery. I agree that he has. In these circumstances I want to ask the minister what steps he is taking to get these fish plants reopened. What steps is he taking to get these trawlers back to sea? Has he met, or will he be meeting, with the Newfoundland minister of fisheries to develop some joint plan to resuscitate the fishing industry, which is now in dire straits, if any industry in this country is in dire straits?

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Madam Speaker, I do not have jurisdiction over licensing fish plants. There are many days I wish I had because, in the last three or four years, there has been one constant repetition in many of my speeches, and that is that we must not load onto the fishery the solution to all economic problems. In its authority the province of Newfoundland chose to increase the capacity of fish processing plants by some 230 per cent. Community stages became feeder plants, feeder plants became full-fledged freezing plants. In fact, the very problem about which the hon. member complains is very much the types of mortgages which were put on the old existing plants by the expansion of the industry which occurred in Newfoundland. I regret that very much. I take no pleasure in having been shown that my warnings were right.

I deplore the fact that the hon. member is not still the minister of fisheries for Newfoundland because we worked well together to solve some problems. I have not received representations from the government of Newfoundland focusing on this issue.

REQUEST THAT MINISTER TAKE ACTION

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the same minister. The seven major plants I mentioned are all offshore trawler-fed plants. This has nothing to do with the licensing referred to by the minister. The minister is attempting to pass the buck. He is the minister of fisheries for all of Canada. Is he developing a plan which will lead to a remedy of this situation? Is he meeting with the Newfoundland minister who, he says, has jurisdiction in certain instances? Will he provide inventory assistance, for example? The minister knows interest rates are