

Statements by Ministers

Minister to call President Reagan and simply explain our case. The first argument given by the Americans for the voyage was that it wanted to save \$500,000. Imagine, the poor little Defence Department of the United States needing to save that money. We could have sent them a cheque for \$500,000 and offered to pay the gas to go through the canal rather than challenge our sovereignty. However, the Government was silent. Now that the horses have left, it is attempting to close the gate.

It did the same thing yesterday. After appointing one Tory person every three hours since it came to power, suddenly it closes the gate on patronage appointments because the number of Tories needing jobs is decreasing. I hope the Minister recognizes what he is doing. There was a strategy behind what took place in the past with regard to our sovereignty because the key in international affairs was he exercising of jurisdiction and we have had that jurisdiction and we have exercised it. This began under Louis St. Laurent when we ensured for many years that there were RCMP, Armed Forces and viable Inuit villages in these areas in order to inform the world that it was Canadian land.

Time is a very important element. When sovereignty is exercised for 100 years, no one can challenge it. Today, the Minister is taking a gamble and making a bold move which might cause the court to look into this case. Now we will either win or lose. The Minister could have been prudent and carried on with our acts of sovereignty protection this summer, without anyone being able to challenge it. We could have used all the "supposed friendship" this government has in the world to make sure our sovereignty was not challenged. Our sovereignty would have been greater in 50 or 100 years.

I hope the Minister will not have to get up in the House in the future to say he is sorry but it is typical of how this Government reacts. It does not know where to go. It makes a decision and then backs off. Last summer my leader challenged the Government to call President Reagan. I raised this problem many times during the summer and I raised this question in the House of Commons. However, the Minister is too late again, fumbling and trying to repair the disaster and humiliation of the nation which his inaction has caused.

We will have to support that action now because we have no choice. He has opened the case in court. I hope we will win but I believe that 50 or 100 more years of sovereignty exercised by the Government, with no challenge from anyone, would have been better. If it is true that there is a policy of friendship with the Government of the United States, it is a shame that President Reagan sent a quasi military ship in our water this summer despite the requests and pleas of the Secretary of State for External Affairs. If we had a Prime Minister who did not always go to the President on his knees, we would have been in a position to challenge the President and say that we will not tolerate such action. We would not be put in the shameful position we are today.

● (1540)

I hope in this case the Minister is sure of himself. I hope we will not lose. I wish the Minister well. He would have been well advised last summer, rather than to laugh at my question in the House of Commons, to have taken the problem seriously and acted.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Chrétien: We would have more positive results now. Probably it is now too late. If the Government wanted to act, why were these actions not proclaimed in July? It was not a technical problem.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Or last year.

Mr. Chrétien: Yes, or last year or 10 years ago. In court, it is not for the one who occupies land to provoke a case. At least I know that. When I have a good case I do not necessarily go to court myself. I wait for the other guy. You never know what the court's decision might be. When you own land, you do not go to court yourself. You wait until your ownership is challenged. That is basic law I learned at university.

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, I fear it is too late. I pray to God that the Minister has not created a situation on which we will be prematurely challenged. I am sad today because the danger is now more than ever caused because we had a Government that did not know what to do. The Government was afraid to offend President Reagan. This Government let him challenge and humiliate Canadians. After the humiliation lasted all summer, the Government comes with an ice-breaker. I am not impressed with the ice-breaker. With the disaster of the Canadian Commercial Bank, we could build two more ice-breakers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Chrétien: I just pray the Minister knows what he is doing. If he had not acted as slowly on such an important matter, he does all the time, we would not be in the awful situation in which we are today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I agree with one of the remarks of the previous speaker that Canadians were humiliated by the *Polar Sea* incident. The image many Canadians have of the new Conservative administration is that a green light has been given to the White House to use our Arctic as a military and economic playground. The image of our Arctic as the new battle-line of fortress America toward the Soviet Union is not without foundation.

Let me deal first with the matter of the *Polar Sea*. I have confirmed today with the Canadian Coastguard that not one but seven Canadian Coastguard ice-breakers could have gone through the passage ahead of the *Polar Sea*. This is a matter of marine sovereignty. The films of overflights from Canadian aircraft were interesting at best, but did little to express the Canadian mood on this issue or to achieve basic requirements