

Oral Questions

I want to ask the Minister of Fisheries what he intends to do to look into this potentially devastating situation.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): What I intend to do, Mr. Speaker, is to set up mechanisms to make sure that neither along the coasts nor on the high seas will people be allowed to unload fish into the ocean, as some people claim this is being done. This is why we have introduced the observers program to prevent such situations. I am prepared to work closely with the fishermen to make sure that this kind of activities will not happen again in the future.

* * *

[English]

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the chairman of the finance committee my question is for the government House Leader.

I am not sure if the government House Leader is aware that on Monday and Tuesday of this week many people requested to be heard on the GST before the committee. The chairman's fax machine was working overtime.

I want to ask the government House leader this. In light of the offer by the chairman of the finance committee, and I quote: "I would be delighted to resign as chairman if that is necessary", can the government House leader now assure the House that the finance committee will be reactivated under a new chairman so that all of these Canadians and many thousands of others can be heard on this very important piece of tax legislation, the GST? Will the committee chairman resign?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, for many weeks and months efforts were made to get the New Democratic Party to co-operate with a reasonable procedure that would allow these people to be heard, allow the bill to be discussed in detail and allow the committee to reach a decision. The New Democrats refused to co-operate with any such effort. Indeed, they are on record as saying they will do everything possible to prevent a decision ever being made by the committee.

Those people were not heard because the New Democratic Party engaged in a 31-hour filibuster which was very entertaining but not too illuminating.

If the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville is suggesting that perhaps we start behaving rationally like mature adults and discuss a procedure for reaching a satisfactory and proper conclusion, I welcome that change. Let us discuss it.

• (1450)

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, the person who was irresponsible, bullheaded and stubborn was the chairman of the finance committee, and the minister knows that.

We have had requests coming in from dozens and dozens and dozens—in fact hundreds—of people across the country to be heard. If he will not reconstitute the committee under a new chairman, whoever that may be, then just how does he propose to let the Canadian people to be heard on the GST?

They want to be heard. They are against the tax. The provinces are against the tax. Small businesses are against the tax. They do not want it. Why not reconstitute the committee? Why not select a new chairman and let the people be heard? Why are you so anti-democratic in this House?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, under parliamentary reform brought in by this government, the committees are masters of their own fate. The chairman is elected by the committee.

Mr. Rodriguez: You used jackboots.

Mr. Andre: In fact, were I to issue the kinds of instructions he is asking me to issue, I would undoubtedly be found in contempt. The hon. member would be the first to raise a point of privilege.

Mr. Peterson: It never stopped you before.

Mr. Andre: There is one way in which things can be done in a mature, adult fashion, and that is for the New Democrats to start behaving like mature adults.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!