

Supply—Fisheries and Forestry

are allowed to take place it will do away with the livelihood of these people. I was shocked and completely amazed by the total lack of interest, and the indifference displayed by the Prime Minister to this situation. Apparently he was completely lacking in interest toward this problem.

This situation affects almost 25 per cent of the population of Newfoundland. They are facing an economic disaster. I do not intend to be critical of the Minister of Fisheries, but yesterday he sat in his office rather than in this house, where he could answer the questions of hon. members. He was not present to discuss these problems because his name was not on the attendance roster for yesterday. This is a most shocking thing and almost beyond human comprehension.

This problem, as I said, affects 25 per cent of the population of a province of this nation. It is an urgent problem, yet the minister is unable, or at least not permitted, to be here in this chamber to answer these questions of extreme importance. This is a terrible situation. As an individual who became a Canadian 19 years ago—and as I have said in this house, I was very proud to be a Canadian—I must confess that I changed my mind slightly yesterday. I am wondering how interested this government is in the welfare of the people of Newfoundland. This is a direct result of the Prime Minister's action yesterday. Let me go a step further and refer to what was actually said in answer to my question. I asked whether the prime minister would consider setting aside one day to discuss this problem, affecting as it does 25 per cent of the population of my province. His answer was "ditto". Let me tell him now on behalf of 125,000 Newfoundlanders who will be affected by this crisis, "ditto" to him too.

I am afraid that word "ditto" will not mean too much to the fishermen of Newfoundland, come Christmas, when Santa Claus does not show up. That word will not fill their bellies, sir, in the month of January or the month of February. I hope the government will take some action, and will not allow these fish plants in Newfoundland to close, thereby affecting a quarter of our population. Let me repeat on behalf of the constituents of my riding, who will be affected by this crisis, and on behalf of the other Newfoundland people, "ditto" to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Bigg: He could not care less.

Mr. Carter: That is understandable.

An hon. Member: That's not fair.

[Mr. Carter.]

Mr. Bigg: He said that yesterday.

Mr. Carter: This government must realize that the fishing industry cannot cure its own ills. It has been pointed out before by other hon. members that Canadian fishermen are competing with foreign industry supported by foreign government subsidies. Serious problems now face the Newfoundland fishing industry, and it requires immediate financial assistance. I hope this government will adopt a policy to make the Canadian fishing industry economical. Let me remind hon. members what the Minister of Fisheries stated in a speech he delivered at the American commercial fish exposition in Boston in October. He stated that we must adopt a policy of making our fishing industry "pay its way". If that is the case we may as well throw in the sponge.

If this government insists on following that line I suggest that the heaviest and most serious charge the minister and his colleagues will have to answer for before history is that they permitted the human resources of my province and other Atlantic provinces to rot away. In my province there is more than a quarter of the population which derives a living, such as it is, from fishing. This government, as well as successive Liberal governments, has allowed this once great industry to die by inches without putting anything in its place except a few handouts. This government is guilty of forcing a once great and industrious people to accept soul destroying welfare.

• (4:30 p.m.)

While I am on the subject of welfare I feel compelled to set the record straight so far as my province is concerned. The idea is fairly current in the rest of Canada that our province is a poor relation, living on Ottawa's hand-outs. Such a complete distortion of the truth can only be the result of prevailing ignorance and prejudice concerning Newfoundland. The simple fact is that Newfoundland gets the second lowest rate of welfare payments from Ottawa of all Canadian provinces, and this is not because we are a small province. I am talking about the per capita rate; the payments to the provinces computed per head of population. Let this house and the government understand once and for all that Newfoundlanders do not want welfare they want jobs. They do not want charity; they want opportunities. Our fishermen do not want welfare; they want a chance to make a decent living from the fisheries. They do not want other Canadians to carry them; they want to pull their own weight.