

Oral Questions

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Madam Speaker, I recognize that there has been a rather low trough in the cycle of the Pacific salmon. In fact, we are expecting a considerable improvement next season. We have been monitoring in co-operation with the fishermen's organization the difficulties which are being met, although it is only now that we have a fairly good assessment of the real extent of the problems they are facing.

I might say to the hon. member that two very senior people have undertaken on my behalf an examination, in consultation with all representatives of the industry. I hope their report will be in my hands in the next week or ten days. In fact, if it is not during the week of the budget, I intend to meet the B.C. fishing representatives on the week of the twentieth.

Mr. Miller: Madam Speaker, I remind the minister that part of the real difficulty facing fishermen in British Columbia is the callous attitude of his government in allowing interest rates to float freely. The problem they have is meeting the 15 per cent to 20 per cent interest costs. In addition, in order to remain competitive in the industry because of overcapitalization they have had to invest in larger vessels. The issue is that there are people right now who are losing their vessels, and I would like the minister to give some assurance that within the next ten days or when he receives that report, he will seriously think about giving some interim support to the fishermen of British Columbia.

Mr. LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I will be meeting with the representatives of all the fishing interests including the union, the trollers and the other organizations. So far they have indicated that they might have problems meeting payments in some individual cases. I asked that they inform my department, and if there is a significant number who do come forward, we will obviously try to assist them. But I really think the hon. member at the moment is slightly exaggerating the dimension of the problem.

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PUBLIC SERVICE**CR CLERKS DISPUTE—DISCIPLINARY ACTION AGAINST EMPLOYEES**

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the President of the Treasury Board. If I understood the minister correctly, he said that apart from breaches of the criminal law questions of discipline would be referred to a special joint review committee. I wonder if the minister can tell us whether he as minister retains any further authority on questions of discipline after those matters have been referred to the special joint review committee.

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, the normal procedure is that if an employee feels that he or she is being improperly disciplined, there is a grievance procedure at the moment which is under

the auspices of the Public Service Staff Relations Board. In the normal circumstance, once the discipline is applied by the appropriate department—the minister of that department has made his position clear and has applied discipline—the matter then goes through the grievance procedure.

What is being suggested here is simply a parallel procedure which will consist of a special committee and joint committee consisting of union representatives and management representatives. If there is disagreement on the severity of the penalty, which would already have been imposed at that point—and the department in question would have notified the employee involved—then the matter can go to a third party appointed by the PSSRB. That is the procedure which has been agreed upon, and it is designed in particular to take into account the circumstances I referred to where there is some question in certain parts of the country as to whether the departments did or did not act properly in certain very particular circumstances.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, if I understand that correctly, the minister is saying that he is delegating away his authority to impose discipline. That was an authority he undertook in this House to impose in response to questions the other day. Will this review committee, which is being established to become involved in deciding whether the minister's word to Parliament will be kept, deal exclusively with CRs, or will it deal also with other public servants who might have taken actions which breached law other than the criminal law?

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, perhaps the right hon. Leader of the Opposition is unaware that discipline is normally applied in all such circumstances by the departments involved and not by the Treasury Board. However, that aside, I am sorry but would the right hon. member care to repeat the second part of the question?

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, I have a great deal of patience for the minister. The second part of the question was as to his guarantee to this House of Commons on Monday that discipline would be effected against public servants who broke the law. Will the review committee he has established, either to carry out or to smother his promise to Parliament, touch simply CRs, or will its authority also extend to other public servants who might have breached a law other than the criminal law?

● (1500)

Mr. Johnston: I apologize, Madam Speaker, for that slight slip of memory in reply to the question. The disciplinary procedure which we are recommending, and this special procedure for review of the discipline which will be applied by departments—I make that point clear, nothing is being smothered, this is a normal disciplinary procedure which will be applied—the review procedure which I have outlined, will apply to all member units of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, all the bargaining units of the Public Service Alliance. It will not apply to other bargaining units. In other words, it will apply to circumstances such as that of firefight-