

S. O. 29

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by congratulating the Hon. Member for Timiskaming (Mr. MacDougall) and other Members of this House for seeking this emergency debate and to express my appreciation and that of the Government of the Chair's decision to have a debate on the matter of the proposed British fur labelling regulation. The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and I have raised this matter directly with British authorities and it will be very helpful to us and to the country to have this debate on record in the House.

As I said here in Parliament on February 10, this Government reacted immediately to the British proposed regulation and very strongly declared our intention to fight it. I am, therefore, pleased to spell out the Government's position on the issue and at the same time help to send a clear signal of the unanimous concern of Members of this House to the British Government. This has been so far if I may say so, Sir, an excellent debate. I hope not only will it continue in that tone but that its contents will be read by parliamentarians in Britain, by Members of the British Government, because what we have here tonight are individual Canadian Members of Parliament, from all of the regions of this unique country expressing concern about an economy and very much about the Canadian tradition and our way of life.

I should stress from the outset that the preservation and enhancement of the environment is not at issue here. Canadians do not need to be read lessons on the care of our natural heritage, including our wildlife. Trapping, hunting and other harvesting are closely monitored and weighed against their environmental impact. The Canadian fur industry has co-operated fully with federal conservation authorities and with the provinces and territories in ensuring that the balance is maintained between different species of wildlife and their habitat.

The British Government, to the best of our knowledge, does not contest this fact. Yet, there is a groundswell of sensitivity in Europe for the animal welfare movement which tends to propagate willfully or unwillfully a false picture of Canadian wildlife management. The current crusade by organized animal groups in Europe, the United States and Canada aims at banning trapping and particularly the use of leg-hold traps.

What is really at issue here? The real issue here is whether an historic and legitimate trade on which important segments of our aboriginal population depend for their livelihood can arbitrarily be destroyed as a result of unsubstantiated accusations. Let me cite, Mr. Speaker, a few figures on what this means for the people of Canada, particularly in the North. Fur is, of course, a billion dollar industry in Canada. But for many people it is much more than an industry. It is the only way they can gain their livelihood. This question is not just about animals, this question is about people, how they respect their traditions, how they maintain their lives and how they build and sustain their communities.

Trapping accounts for approximately 50 per cent of our fur harvest. It employs over 100,000 people of whom at least 50,000 are from native communities. Therefore, the imposition of this regulation will seriously affect 50,000 native Canadians whose sole source of income in many cases is from the traditional occupations of hunting, trapping and fishing. Trapping provides or supplements income for thousands of Canadians in rural and remote regions where, very often, there is little alternative employment or only seasonal work. The fur industry is characterized primarily by small family run operations at all levels of the production chain.

Since 1980, the number of furs sold has declined, yet the yearly average value of furs exported from Canada is approximately \$350 million. Europe currently constitutes the second largest market-place for Canadian fur products with total recorded sales of \$150 million in 1987. The United Kingdom was second to West Germany among our European markets. It is clearly possible for an action of the British Government to disrupt the livelihood of hundreds of small Canadian communities. That is what we are here tonight seeking to avoid. That is why this Government has steadfastly rebutted the arguments of the British opponents of fur trapping while, at the same time, pursuing proposals for international standards of humane trapping which would meet any legitimate concern.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, this is not a marginal market. However, the paradox here is that most operators on this market belong to a minority whose economic activity is constantly subjected to unfair criticism.

Canadian representatives met their European counterparts in April to keep them informed of Canadian concerns. Ministers from the Northwest Territories visited Great Britain to explain the impact the measures proposed by the British might have on our northern communities. The Office of our High Commissioner in London has been in touch with all levels of the industry in Great Britain. Members of this House have spoken directly to and corresponded with British members.

At the Cabinet level, my colleague, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Andre), raised the matter at recent talks in London. Personally, I also raised the subject in the course of bilateral discussions with Sir Geoffrey Howe. After these meetings, it was clear to all concerned that unjustified action that could be seriously damaging to Canadian communities could not but have a disastrous impact on our relations. The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) discussed the matter during his conversations with Mrs. Thatcher, who said she wanted to obtain more information on the subject.

[*English*]

I hope, Sir, reason will prevail and Mrs. Thatcher will see to it that the proposed regulation is not adopted by the British Cabinet. But we need to remind ourselves and our British friends of some basic facts regarding trapping in Canada.