

Oral Questions

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Mr. Speaker, most of the questions raised in this House are hypothetical, but they still have to be dealt with so I would like to deal with this one.

With respect to the hon. member's latest hypothetical question, the position is that Canada made a generous offer to France in accordance with our obligations under the 1972 treaty entered into by—I will not even mention the name of the government—a Liberal government.

Under the terms of that arrangement we had to offer to France the opportunity to catch fish within our waters, but Canada has the right to determine what amount it should be permitted to catch based on conservation and the like.

Despite our difficulties we did make a generous offer to France which was not accepted after a number of meetings so any next move is up to France. We cannot go any further. We are not going to go any further when our own fishermen are in desperate straits as a result of a decline in the resource.

With respect to the suggestion by France that this issue should go to arbitration under the terms of the 1972 agreement, our position is clear. We will not put that kind of an issue to arbitration. We are sovereign in our own waters and the question of what amount of fish should be taken by anybody within our own 200-mile economic zone is for Canada and Canada alone to decide. We will never agree to go to arbitration on that issue.

Hon. Roger C. Simmons (Burin—St. George's): Mr. Speaker, I suppose hypothetically with that kind of leadership and a nice blond wig he should run for leader.

This scallop fishery has been at a standstill down there since last summer. The minister has been quoted in the press the last few days as saying that he is optimistic, that after the French elections this weekend are out of the way we can expect a resolution forthcoming and fairly quick.

What is in store for that scallop fishery in the event that his latest bit of optimism is not well founded? What is his plan *b*?

• (1440)

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Mr. Speaker, I am under very heavy pressure these days and that is why I am somewhat nervous. If I could speak two or three consecutive sentences in French I would be already in the race and well on the way to winning, I can assure you of that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: That might well be hypothetical.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Crosbie: *Oui, monsieur le Président*, we do have a serious problem with the fishery for Icelandic scallops in the area because the most prospective areas are on the St. Pierre bank controlled by France.

There will be no settlement with France unless we have proper access to those scallops, as the hon. gentleman knows. I am hoping when the election is over in France that we will have some progress in that direction.

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TRADE

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer probably makes many Canadians very happy that this is an officially bilingual country. My question is for the Minister for International Trade.

Mr. McDermid: Explain yourself.

Mr. Murphy: The government intends to introduce the trade bill for second reading tomorrow for a partial day's debate and to close off debate at second reading after one more day next week.

I ask the minister: How can the government be so outrageous as to limit debate to less than two days on an issue that is so important to so many Canadians?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend might ask himself that question because I believe for two weeks now we have been trying to get this bill into the House, and we have been obstructed at every turn in the road by the New Democratic Party.

Mr. Barrett: You used closure.