

Continental Shelf Boundary

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): She said you are doing great.

Mr. Crouse: If that is so, that is fine. I am in a section of the House where the sound does not carry.

In conclusion, I support in principle the request of the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe that the present administration give serious consideration to his request for the production of papers that will inform, and hopefully encourage us to understand better the steps being taken by the government to secure agreement.

It is perhaps the secrecy that surrounds the government's activities that causes us the most concern. We are as interested as anyone on the other side in trying to reach a suitable accommodation which would lead to a proper settlement of the areas that I mentioned, St. Pierre and Miquelon and the Georges Bank areas, both of which represent prolific fishing areas, not only to the fishermen of Nova Scotia but all of Atlantic Canada. Therefore, I hope that serious consideration is given to this request and that some action is taken by the government in the not too distant future on this important matter.

Mr. Mike Landers (Saint John-Lancaster): Mr. Speaker, I have learned something today. The hon. member for Mississauga (Mr. Abbott) pointed out that at one time there was only one member of the official opposition present in the House. I am glad to see that since they learned I was going to speak the number increased fivefold.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Naturally I look forward to the speech of the hon. member for Saint John-Lancaster (Mr. Landers). However, if the opening of his speech is any indication of its content, he might drive us all away.

Mr. Landers: Since their numbers have increased fivefold, I can only assume that they came to learn something.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Landers: Before starting this esoteric speech I wish to point out that not only was the hon. member for Saint John-Lancaster (Mr. Landers) present in the House when the point of order was raised, but also the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) whose mother came from Saint John, New Brunswick. Therefore the southern coast of New Brunswick was represented not only in body, but also in spirit.

Basically the documents requested are not being made public because they fall under exemption No. 3 in the "Guidelines for Notices of Motion for the Production of Papers," under which are exempted:

Papers dealing with international relations, the release of which might be detrimental to the future conduct of Canada's foreign relations; (the release of papers received from other countries to be subject to the consent of the originating country).

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the following exemptions apply in whole or in part to the documents requested: Exemption No. 10:

Papers relating to negotiations leading up to a contract—

[Mr. Crouse.]

In this case a possible international agreement. Exemption No. 15:

Internal departmental memoranda.

Motion No. 70 requests copies of all minutes of meetings, letters and telegrams pertaining to the negotiations. Phrased in these terms there can be little doubt that the motion requests documents falling under exemptions Nos. 3, 10 and 15.

Looking first at exemption No. 3, it seems reasonable to assume that there would be general agreement on not releasing documents if the release of the documents would be detrimental to the future conduct of Canada's foreign relations.

I see that I have run out of time, although I have much more to contribute to this particular debate.

An hon. Member: Carry on.

Mr. Landers: As I was just going to say, Mr. Speaker, the point at issue is whether the release of the particular documents requested would actually have such detrimental effects.

In this case there can be little doubt that there would be detrimental effects. The negotiations in question have been conducted on the understanding that they were confidential. To release the documents requested would be to make the negotiations retroactively public. In effect this would amount to a breach of an understanding, and this could scarcely fail to have detrimental effects on the future conduct of Canada's foreign relations.

Furthermore, the documents requested include communications from a foreign country, and under the guidelines it would be necessary to obtain the consent of the originating country before releasing the documents concerned. In this connection it is worth while recalling that the communications from the country concerned were received in confidence. The opposition is asking for documents to be produced that were received in confidence.

Mr. Marshall: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not usually object, but the motion I presented concerns Canada's position in the world in international agreements. It not only affects the livelihood of Canadians, but Canada's position. It could affect many starving people in Third World countries.

I do not like to criticize any member, but this has become a joke. I wish I had not even presented the motion. I could have presented it in my own district through the press. It is disgusting to have to listen to this.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. It being six o'clock, the hour appointed for the consideration of private members' business has expired. I do now leave the chair until eight o'clock.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.