

Atlantic Fisheries Restructuring Act

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my thanks to all Committee Members from all Parties in this House who, in addition to their co-operation, were also generous with their knowledge of the fishing industry and suggested various amendments that were accepted by the Government. The Committee's sittings were most instructive, but I hasten to add that the Member for Gloucester (Mr. Breau), in addition to taking part in the sittings of the Parliamentary Committee, also sent, early this week, a long brief detailing various items of major importance to the Atlantic fisheries, and more particularly to New Brunswick. I want to take this opportunity to inform my hon. colleague that I read his brief with great interest, and that I intend to meet him as soon as possible to have a thorough discussion of the various points he raised, and I hope that at that time we shall be able to find positive solutions for the very basic concerns he raised and which arise from the need to provide stability for the fisheries and a fair apportioning of the jobs and profits to be generated by this industry in the various Atlantic regions, and especially in New Brunswick. I therefore wish to thank the Hon. Member for his brief.

[English]

I would also like to express our appreciation to the many witnesses who came at short notice, and in some cases, at no small inconvenience, to Ottawa for these hearings, and for giving their time and energy so freely when they were here. I am also, of course, very happy that the Ministers of Fisheries of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, or their representatives, came before our committee.

[Translation]

If I have one regret, it is that among all the Ministers of Fisheries, the only one who did not come personally or send a representative was the Quebec Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Fortunately, the board of directors of Pêcheurs-Unis and representatives of employees and unions appeared before the Committee to express their support for this legislation. I think this goes to show that the Canadian Government, not the Government of Quebec, has understood the aspirations of the parties concerned in Quebec's fishing industry. The Quebec Government acknowledged publicly that the ideological issues were more important than the welfare of the fishermen.

● (1600)

[English]

The time has now come to act on this Bill. The industry has been through traumatic times. Fishermen, processors, suppliers, everyone connected with this strategically important Atlantic industry has been in a state of uncertainty and confusion about the future. That in itself is an unhealthy state of affairs. It is important to replace uncertainty with a clear sense of purpose and direction. We must do so quickly. Time is

precious and delay is costly. For instance, interest charges of about \$1 million a week are accumulating on existing loans which will be rolled into equity once these measures are in place. In some regions, the next fishing season is barely a month away. I urge the House to carry through on the momentum we have achieved and to approve this Bill unanimously.

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (South Shore): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on Bill C-170 at third reading. The theme of my speech is "onward through the fog", because Bill C-170 has blanketed Atlantic Canada in a thick fog of confusion, fear and contradictory Liberal promises.

This Government claims to have finally realized that the fishery must be economically viable and privately owned. Yet it intends to achieve these ends by literally nationalizing some 65 per cent of the productive capacity of the industry. Through negotiations with only two Atlantic provincial Governments, this Government intends to force through a program that will have serious impact on the five Provinces around the Gulf of St. Lawrence. This Government has literally guaranteed the jobs of some plant workers and left others to compete against them without any protection whatsoever. While promising that the industry will be denationalized as soon as possible and that the competitive balance of the marketplace will not be upset, this Government is incapable of providing any detail as to how these specific aims are to be achieved. No wonder many independent operators are taking the attitude that the federal Government should buy their businesses now while they are viable, before they are driven into ruin by trying to compete against nationalized, subsidized enterprises.

Of all the foggy Liberal notions, Mr. Speaker, one of the foggiest was that somehow the people of Atlantic Canada would not notice what was being done to them if this Bill was rushed through Parliament. Last week, as we crammed some 33 hours of committee meetings into four days, it was quite apparent to practically everyone that Atlantic Canadians knew only too well what was being planned, and for the most part they wanted no part of it. Among 17 witnesses who appeared before the committee, 12 were solidly opposed to the Liberal assault on the fishing industry. Today in the House we still feel, at least on the Opposition side, that a gun is being held to our heads to pass this Bill and allow the federal Government to get these restructured companies established before 1984.

The Opposition has been criticized for delaying this Bill six days at second reading. Quite frankly, Sir, we strongly resent such criticism. It is none other than the Liberals who delayed this Bill 14 days at first reading and delayed its introduction for a full month after signing a restructuring agreement with Newfoundland and Labrador. Look at the delays this Government took in the restructuring as a whole and you will find that the Government took six months to negotiate the Newfoundland agreement alone. The Nova Scotia agreement, if there ever is to be one, will take even longer because this Liberal Government has unfortunately backed down from verbal assurances it made in September. Meanwhile the proposed restructuring in Quebec is being fought at every turn of