

Oral Questions

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, if the Hon. Member is starting an ideal position, I would agree with him. I do not know if he is thinking of any particular case, but we would have to look at whether in practice you were in effect creating jobs or not. If the effect of forcing a corporation that is the recipient of grants to buy some of its supplies in Canada would be that the corporation cannot operate because it is not competitive, I would say that is a case where we had better keep the corporation competitive and operating, creating the jobs it can, rather than deny the very rationale of the grants, which is to create jobs, by forcing the corporation to take them on conditions which make it inoperable.

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FISHERIES

SALE OF COD BLOCKS TO UNITED STATES

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Fisheries, but some 20 Cabinet Ministers are missing.

Some Hon. Members: Where's Brian?

● (1430)

Mr. Crosbie: Where is Pinocchio? In the absence of 20 Ministers, my question is directed to the Minister who is responsible for foreign trade. That is Gerry Regan.

Some Hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Crosbie: I am sorry.

Some Hon. Members: Where is Brian?

Mr. Crosbie: I will ask my question when the clowns cease their braying, Mr. Speaker.

I trust that the Hon. Minister will be aware that the sale of cod blocks in the United States is endangered by the fact that the price has now descended to 85 cents a pound, the lowest price it has been in many years. The entire Canadian fishing industry is in danger.

Could the Minister advise the House what he sees as being the prospects for the sale of fishery products, particularly cod blocks, in the United States? Is the Government contemplating using the Fishery Prices Support Board to attempt to assist producers and fishermen so that the price of cod blocks does not cause a cessation of the entire eastern Canadian fishery this year?

Hon. Gerald Regan (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member has mentioned the problem of fluctuating prices for Canadian fish, and particularly for cod blocks in the American market. As a representative of Newfoundland he will be keenly aware of the different factors that affect the price in the Boston market, in particular.

I am sure he is aware of the fact that the softness of European currencies in relation to the strong level of the

Canadian dollar is a factor that has led to sales of fish from European countries in the American market. This has depressed the price, and has to some degree tended to set the price and force the Canadian price downward. That, of course, is a problem that is difficult to address because it does involve the fluctuation of international currencies. The question of what can possibly be done by way of support prices is one which I would be happy to explore with the Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans on behalf of the Hon. Member.

IMPORTANCE OF COD FISHERY TO NEWFOUNDLAND

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Mr. Speaker, I direct my supplementary question to the same Minister in the absence of 20 other Cabinet Ministers who are out around the country and are not here doing the job they are supposed to do.

Some Hon. Members: Where is Brian?

Mr. Crosbie: Because of the failure—the Minister is having difficulty hearing.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Crosbie: Because of the failure of cod block prices this year, the cod fishery in Newfoundland is being endangered. Many hundreds of fishermen may not find a firm to which they may sell cod this year. The Government has a heavy financial involvement in Fishery Products International Limited, as well as in National Sea Products. Is the Government prepared to advance further sums of money to Fishery Products International Limited so that it may meet its losses and continue to buy all codfish offerings from the inshore and offshore fishery of Newfoundland, thus ensuring that there will be a market for fishermen this year?

Hon. Gerald Regan (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I rise to answer the hon. gentleman's question in the presence of 11 empty seats in the front benches of the Conservative opposition, at a time when the Leader of the Opposition is not present and they have a total of about 35 or 40 Members in the House.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Chair would simply observe that the practice of calling attention to the presence or absence of Hon. Members is not the custom of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Regan: I certainly follow the lead of the Chair in that regard, but I had been following the example set by my esteemed colleague, the Hon. Member for St. John's West.

May I turn more directly to the subject matter by saying that I am keenly aware of the importance of the cod fishery to the welfare and the survival of the people of Newfoundland inasmuch as some of my ancestors in Newfoundland depended upon that livelihood for a very long period of time. I might simply add that I am sure that in those days my ancestors had