

Supply

fishermen anywhere in Canadian waters in 1988. That is a great step forward. No previous Government has ever had the courage to do that. It has brought significant benefit to our fishermen. In the absence of an over-all fisheries agreement and without an agreement to send the boundary dispute to international arbitration, there would be no fish for France outside the disputed zone.

What I am saying is that we are making considerable progress in spite of the strong and misleading protests of opposition Members, that is, until France decided to arrest the little guy, the Newfoundland southshore fishermen whose livelihood has been at the heart of this dispute since the outset.

There is an inshore zone some 25 miles across between the Burin Peninsula and the Islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. In that zone there has been an understanding that these small inshore fishermen, both from St. Pierre and Miquelon and from Newfoundland, would be free to fish unimpeded as they have been for decades. They fish alongside. They do not have sophisticated navigational aids. They are not the large, 150 or 200-foot trawlers with efficient processing on board. These are small trawlers, longliners, local fishing boats, and both Canada and France have understood that the interests of those immediate communities and fishermen should be respected by allowing this arrangement to continue. All that ended yesterday when the little guy got hit hard by big France through the apprehension of one of our vessels by a French naval vessel.

We will not stand idly by and watch our fishermen from these communities which are so dependent on this resource, these inshore fishermen whose earnings are far lower than those of the fishermen of St. Pierre and Miquelon, to be harassed in this way. That is why the Government took the swift action announced this morning by the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark). We will suspend the discussions between our negotiator and the French negotiator which were directed toward finding a way of mediating this problem. The Secretary of State for External Affairs called in the French Ambassador and issued an official protest over this matter. We will defend and support our fishermen, the captain and crew of the vessel concerned.

As conditions develop, other measures, I am sure, will be taken as necessary. Therefore, I would just say in conclusion that it is most irresponsible, unacceptable and reprehensible that members of the Opposition demand some kind of escalation. If it is not a trade war, it is a physical war they advocate. How could we fight such a war with our country as defenceless as it is? This is an absolutely ridiculous suggestion. We are being moderate and we have made great progress on behalf of the fishermen of Newfoundland and Atlantic Canada and will continue to do so. We are prepared to sit down with France and seek an orderly settlement of this question, but not until they reverse this totally unacceptable provocation which they wreaked upon Canada yesterday.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robichaud: Mr. Speaker, in his speech, the Minister told us right at the beginning that the Hon. Member for Gander—Twillingate (Mr. Baker) was telling all kinds of lies, that there was no plane, there was no helicopter, there was no boat in that region for surveillance. Nevertheless, the Minister assures us that the Canadian vessel was inside the boundaries of St. Pierre and Miquelon.

My first question is: If there was no surveillance, how can he say that our boat was indeed inside these boundaries?

He then said that it was his Government that had managed to get the boats of the metropolitan fleet out of the Gulf. But should those boats not have been out, under Section 3 of the 1972 Treaty that states:

[*English*]

“Fishing vessels registered in Metropolitan France may continue to fish from January 15 to May 15 each year up to May 1, 1986.” It is not our Government that made it so that the metropolitan fleet would be moved out of the gulf.

I ask the Minister if he would comment on that, please.

Mr. Siddon: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member raises two important questions. He asks, if we allege that our vessel was within the territorial waters of St. Pierre and Miquelon, how would we know that if there were no aircraft or vessels present? I can assure the Hon. Member there were no vessels or aircraft of the fisheries service, the Coast guard or the RCMP in that vicinity, I am told. However, the point at which the vessel was apprehended was very close to the boundary, and I understand that the Master himself may well have admitted that he was within the territorial waters of St. Pierre and Miquelon.

This illustrates the danger of shooting from the hip and reacting in an inappropriate manner, as the Hon. Member for Gander—Twillingate did yesterday. I think that shows a lack of forethought, a lack of caution. Had the vessel been outside the territorial waters of St. Pierre and Miquelon, the incident would have been a far worse provocation. Notwithstanding that this is an unacceptable provocation in its present form, we cannot at this point be absolutely certain that our vessel was in the territorial waters of St. Pierre and Miquelon. The evidence of whatever proceedings follow will show that. However, I can assure the Hon. Member that when the Hon. Member for Gander—Twillingate alleges that an RCMP helicopter was flying overhead and Canadian patrol vessels were nearby, he is absolutely and totally misleading this House and the people of Canada.

With regard to the 1972 treaty and the withdrawal of the French metropolitan fleet from the gulf, the Hon. Member will know, if he studies history a little bit, that there were three five-year renewals of that 15-year right to fish in Canadian waters from 1971 to the May period of 1986. There were three consecutive renewals. The treaty did not specify the quantity