

DECLINE IN CATCH OF INSHORE LOBSTERS

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (South Shore): Madam Speaker, in the same area, fishermen along the south shore of Nova Scotia are complaining about the decline in their lobster catches. They are blaming some of the decline on the larger boats using larger traps, that is, fishing trawls with 20 traps on a line, in deep water on the offshore banks where the catch has been heavy with what we call seeded or berried lobsters.

Is the minister aware of these facts, and will he consider carrying out biological studies to determine whether the heavy offshore catches are affecting the inshore stocks?

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Madam Speaker, perhaps I could add one phrase to my previous answer before answering this second question. The Canadian catch of scallops this year has shown a significant increase over last year.

On the hon. member's second question, the problem is a long-standing one. Scientific opinion now is that there is an effect on the inshore lobster fishery more directly linked than we had assumed in the past. We are looking at more restrictive measures. This is part of the balance of trying to find a fair and equitable distribution of the benefits between the interests of two competing groups of fishermen.

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CIVIL RIGHTS

REQUEST FOR EXTENSION OF FRANCHISE TO PENITENTIARY INMATES

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Solicitor General. As the minister knows, the government of Quebec recently amended its provincial elections act to permit prisoners the right to vote. Despite the fact that some 3,000 prisoners in provincial institutions are being granted this right to vote, 2,000 prisoners in federal institutions are being arbitrarily denied this fundamental democratic right by the minister, on administrative grounds.

In view of the fact that imprisonment involves the loss of liberty, but surely not the loss of all other fundamental civil rights, will the minister reconsider this decision and permit federal prisoners in Quebec to exercise the franchise extended to them by provincial legislation and not subvert the will of the Quebec provincial legislature, allowing these prisoners the right to vote in the upcoming Quebec election?

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General): Madam Speaker, in this matter there is a problem of order and security in the institutions.

Mr. Crosbie: Free them for the day.

Mr. Kaplan: It is quite right that it is a matter for the province to determine. However, we were able to permit the officials of the government of Quebec to conduct the referendum in the prisons, but conducting a referendum is much less

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complicated than conducting a full election. Votes go many hundreds of miles from prisons to polling booths around the province. Candidates also hundreds of miles away have the right to access to individuals in prisons.

I do not mean to indicate to the provinces that we would never allow elections to be conducted in federal institutions, although it is a fact that no other province or the federal government gives the right to these people to vote in their elections. I am anxious to see whether the problems of inmates' privacy, order in the prisons and security can be successfully dealt with in one case in this country, that is, the conduct of this Quebec election in Quebec provincial institutions. If all of the problems which I have indicated—and there are others which I cannot describe in the format of the Question Period—can be met and dealt with satisfactorily, we would in the future be prepared, as we were in the referendum, to allow federal institutions to accommodate provincial election machinery.

REASONS FOR POSITION TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Madam Speaker, naturally it is rather interesting to note that somehow order and security can be maintained in provincial institutions but not in the federal institutions.

The minister agreed at a recent session of the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution that the proposed charter of rights may very well extend the right to vote to all prisoners at both the provincial and federal level. Why is the government now, naturally with the support and encouragement of the Quebec Liberal leader, Claude Ryan—and it is not surprising in view of the 80 per cent result in favour of the PQ position in the referendum campaign last fall—denying this fundamental right to vote to prisoners, and very likely violating its own charter of rights and freedoms?

● (1200)

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General): Madam Speaker, when the hon. member says that matters of order and security do not seem to arise in the case of the provincial institutions in the province of Quebec, he is taking quite a lot for granted. The vote has not yet been held. There are a lot of problems still to be resolved. I do not know whether those institutions will be able to conduct fair elections consistent with order and security. Even if they do, the institutions for which Canada is responsible tend to contain more dangerous and violent offenders because they have been sentenced to two years before we get them, whereas in the provinces there are often people who have just been sentenced to 30 days. It is a totally different problem.

As to whether the right to vote is accorded by the charter of rights and freedoms to inmates, I speculated in front of the committee that it might. I do not know how a court will interpret, whether it is reasonable, as our Elections Act provides, to withhold the right to vote from inmates. I indicated it would be a matter for the court to decide. Certainly if the