

can be a general practice. It really has to be decided upon once we know the subject matter that is to be before us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): That is fine. The Chair will take that into consideration.

An Hon. Member: Order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): You want to put a House Order in today.

Mr. Gauthier: I am not asking for consideration from the Chair. I am asking for the House to agree that the Opposition Parties may today, by exception, split their times, their 20 minutes plus 10, into two periods of 10 plus five. What I want is an Order or an agreement amongst all of us here to that effect.

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I believe that there is that agreement. Debate. The Hon. Minister of Public Works.

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my hon. friend who has just spoken on his usual eloquent and somewhat, if I may say so, exaggerated rhetoric. Nonetheless, I know that my colleague from St. John's East will be making some very timely remarks to rebut some of the points that he has made.

I would just like to point out to him that some of the points he has made are hardly new. Way back in the early 1970s, the foreign fleets were even closer to our shores. Some of the difficulties which the Hon. Member refers to with respect to our friends from France are the result of treaties that his Government made, which are now quite difficult from which to extricate ourselves. Having said that, I was kind of hoping that I would hear from my colleague opposite, who is a very knowledgeable Member, some timely remarks on some constructive things that he might be suggesting to deal with some of these problems he is talking about. Instead of that, we get the usual lugubrious and exaggerated kinds of rhetoric that sometimes makes me think vaudeville is on the way back.

I would like to say this morning that perhaps it would be more appropriate, at least in my case, if I could deal just briefly with some of the other issues which I think might be timely in response to this motion that has been put forward by my colleague. Our Government is, as this House knows upon reflection, very conscious of the need to provide increasing economic assistance and leadership

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in Atlantic Canada. It has done so more than any other Government in history. The facts speak for themselves.

To put it in perspective, the interest charges on the present public debt are about \$39 billion, which incidentally is about the level of the deficit that the former Government left us when it was rejected by Canadians five years and two elections ago.

An Hon. Member: Which you have doubled.

Mr. MacKay: At that time, when we had this very critical time in Atlantic Canada, the Liberal Government allotted \$185 million on average to help Atlantic Canada, not the half a billion dollars that our Government has made available this fiscal year, not to mention for the moment the rest of the transfers that flow into Atlantic Canada through increasing equalization, CAP and other programs. Consider these as well. Remember, colleagues and Mr. Speaker, that during the last tenure of the Liberal Government, right in the middle of it, when things were at their nadir in Atlantic Canada, when things were really down in the heel, to put it in the vernacular—interest rates, inflation, unemployment all up—we were allocated only \$150 million to assist us for regional development. As Casey Stengel would say: "You can look it up." Three times more money is available today for Atlantic Canada at a time when, as my hon. friend suggests, the fisheries are in some difficulty and there is a need for some assistance. This year, we have half a billion dollars ready to flow into Atlantic Canada.

That figure is very interesting because, thanks to the legacy of debt that we received, right now it takes over 20 times more than is allocated for regional development just to pay the interest on the public debt. I think people in Atlantic Canada would certainly be appreciative of the fact that at this time, when the Government is under such pressure because of the debt that we inherited, we are allocating over three times more in regional development aid to help Atlantic Canada than was the case in 1982 and 1983.

It is the federal Government that made it possible, and is making it possible, for the Governments in Atlantic Canada, the provincial treasurers and the premiers, to proudly announce—and we are happy for them—that they are making considerable progress in coming to grips with their own economic difficulties, in coming close and in some cases succeeding in balancing their budgets. Does the federal Government get any credit for this? To listen to the litany of doom coming from across the other side of the House, you would think that the opposite were true. Mr. Speaker, Canadians are fair. They know very well that this country has certain economic difficulties, not the least of which is a debt problem, and they