

Fisheries

I personally support their stand because in this day and age it is generally recognized, given the importance of the industry to Canada and given the fact that the industry contributes substantially to Canada's balance of payments and to helping feed the world, that Canada's fishermen should operate under some system of guaranteed income. Our fishermen are striking for this very principle. What the outcome of this strike will be is difficult to say, but certainly the government of Canada has a great responsibility. Indeed, under the constitution the government of Canada has all the responsibility for fisheries: it has total jurisdiction. Whatever jurisdiction is enjoyed by the provinces is enjoyed by the advice and consent of the federal government through an exchange of notes. Yet so far as this dispute involving the industry in Newfoundland is concerned, a strike which could have very serious consequences for the economy of our province, thus far the government of Canada is but a passive bystander.

I hope that the new minister of state responsible for fisheries will discuss with his counterpart in the province of Newfoundland ways and means in which the government of Canada can assist directly in bringing about a settlement of that dispute. I have no hesitation in saying that I admire the present minister of state responsible for fisheries. I think he is trying to do a good job. He has shown that he can apply whatever ability he has to the industry because he is able to bring to it the sympathy and understanding of one who comes from the north shore of the province of New Brunswick. The only thing I regret is that, because of the limitations of the present statute on the government's organization, the minister cannot be truly effective as the fisheries minister because he does not have the ultimate responsibility of presiding over a department of fisheries of Canada.

● (1620)

That brings me to the resolution which is now before the House. The industry is in great distress. This industry employs many thousands of people in the Atlantic provinces and many more thousands are dependent upon it. This applies to the Pacific fisheries as well and, of course, to a lesser extent, to the inland freshwater fisheries. This industry is going through the most serious crisis of its long and troubled existence. Now more than ever before we need to address ourselves to this problem by having the activities of the various statutes of this parliament dealing with fisheries under a separate administration and under a separate department, as it was up to 1971. I call upon my colleagues in the House, and particularly my colleagues who sit on the opposite side of the House, to address themselves to this resolution in a sympathetic way, bearing in mind the fact that their party and their caucus is indeed committed to do just that, so that we can get on with the job of dealing with the very serious difficulties facing the industry today.

Just to give an idea of how serious the problem is, even if we do succeed in March at Geneva in obtaining agreement to extend our control for purposes of management and conservation over the continental shelf and its extremities, it is estimated that it will take at least five years for us to bring just the groundfishery, the mainstay of the industry, back to the stage where it was before the

present overfishing began to take its toll. It will take five years to bring it back to the commercially viable industry that it was for many years. That I merely state to illustrate the seriousness of the problem.

I do hope that hon. members of this House support the resolution because it commits the government to nothing. It does not commit the government. It would merely add strength to the resolutions already adopted by the Progressive Conservative caucus, by the Progressive Conservative convention by the Liberal convention, and by the Liberal Atlantic caucus. Perhaps as a result of this resolution the government may see fit to amend the Government Organization Act and once again institute a separate department of fisheries which would then be able more properly to address itself to the very serious problems facing this industry.

[Translation]

Mr. Herb Breau (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Madam Speaker, I am happy to take part in this debate, first of all to thank the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) for having taken this opportunity to draw the attention of the House, however generally, to certain fishing matters.

He will note, on listening to my speech, that I do not agree with his proposals regarding organization, but I can say that I do share his concern about the situation of the fisheries, not only now but generally.

[English]

I believe in the immediacy of the problem in the fishery, and I hope the problems we have will give the government the opportunity, and the public support which I think is needed, to intervene in the fishing industry. I believe there is a need for state intervention in this industry at this time.

One of the problems in the industry has been due to the fact that in some areas it is a seasonal industry. Added to that is the fact that we are dependent on the United States in that three quarters of our production is marketed in the United States, at least from eastern Canada. I believe this has made us dependent on a marketing organization or a marketing structure which has been playing with the industry for years and which makes the fishing industry an uncertain one for the fishermen as well as for the plant. I hope that this bad side of the cycle which we see now in marketing, regardless of the reasons—which are different from other aspects of marketing—will be corrected.

So I say, I hope that the government will intervene in the fishing industry, and that the industry will understand and accept the type of intervention which I think is needed. I do not speak of intervention in the sense that the government has to take over the industry; I hope the government will intervene, as it has in the last year in some cases, to give financial support or price support or provide financing for inventory, for stocks, or to help the industry with storage. I believe we are going to be involved in such a way and that we might as well take positive action and have some permanent organizations placed on the statutes and put in operation in this country.

I believe that we should have a marketing organization funded by the government which will have enough money