

Oral Questions

was certainly not the tenor or the atmosphere which his speech created this morning. I believe anyone who listened to it would reach the same conclusion.

I assure the right hon. member that there is absolutely no basis for the suggestion in the media that the Prime Minister in any way presented, or will present, the provinces with an ultimatum at this particular conference.

● (1152)

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is this: has the government decided, as was stated by the Prime Minister outside the conference, that regardless whether the provinces accept the changes he has in mind to which I have referred, the Government of Canada intends to place measures before parliament? Does the government intend to do that, irrespective of the feelings of the provinces which will be greatly affected, as will all Canadians, by such changes?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I think this is a good opportunity to restate what has been the attitude of the government from the very beginning, that the proposals put forward in the paper, and subsequently in the bill, were proposals and were not final decisions. We have said from the beginning, "These are our views. Please express your views." That invitation was again put forward this morning by the Prime Minister to the premiers, "We have presented what we think. Will you now tell us what you think so that we can see if we can reach consensus on the major issues facing us in the way of constitutional reform?"

I can assure the right hon. gentleman, again, that the original proposals will not be pushed ahead without taking the provinces into account and listening to them, to the joint committee of the House and the Senate and to other interested Canadians. That is the process we propose to follow.

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FISHERIES**PROPOSED PHASING-OUT OF FISHING VESSELS' INSURANCE PROGRAM—GOVERNMENT POLICY**

Mr. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Mr. Speaker, I should like to get back to the Deputy Prime Minister on a matter of great concern to the fishing industry in the part of the country he represents and also right across the nation. I refer to the announcement of the phasing-out of the fishing vessels' insurance program.

In Nova Scotia this weekend a resolution was passed by a large number of fishermen deploring this. I would ordinarily have waited, sir, until the Minister of Fisheries and the Environment was back in the House, but since I contacted him over three weeks ago and have had no definite response I wonder whether the Deputy Prime Minister would indicate his feeling and government policy as to this possible phasing out, keeping in mind that it is not really a restraint-related matter but it is actually showing a profit and is an excellent program.

[Mr. MacEachen.]

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, in respect of the important question raised by the hon. member, it is not the intention of the government to reduce the protection made available to the fishermen. It is possible there are other alternatives that can be examined which will provide the same level of protection.

I understand the Minister of Fisheries and the Environment has undertaken to consider the matter further and to meet with fishermen to see whether satisfactory alternative arrangements can be worked out to provide the same level of protection to the fishermen.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the Deputy Prime Minister's answer, but will he undertake to keep in mind that the private insurers, who are for the most part based in areas like New York and London, will be very hard put to provide the same level of protection for the same cost and to provide the same amount of service? Will he undertake to make representation to his cabinet colleagues that it is very unlikely any private insurance program can provide the same type of protection and benefits to Canadian fishermen—over 5,000 of them at this point, I believe—provided by the present program?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I can agree with the hon. member's financial analysis, but that is not the important thing. The question is whether we can provide alternatives that will be of equal advantage to the fishermen, and that is what we are attempting to do.

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URBAN AFFAIRS**MORTGAGE PAYMENT DEFAULTS UNDER AHOP—GOVERNMENT POSITION**

Mr. Stan Darling (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct my question to the Minister of State for Urban Affairs. Data released by CMHC last week show an alarming and disturbing increase in the number of mortgage payment defaults in respect of the Assisted Home Ownership Program: there were 826 defaults in the first nine months of 1978, more than double the total of the past four years.

Is the minister aware that, relative to other types of mortgage defaults, the AHOP figures are astronomically high? Does he now admit to the failure of his department's policies, and will he undertake to assure the House that he will take specific measures to resolve the threat of economic disaster which may confront numerous home owners?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): No, Mr. Speaker; the figures which have been published demonstrate in fact that there have been 800 payment defaults out of some 603,000 loans approved. Consequently, if the hon. member wants to make the calculation, he will see that in fact