

• (2200)

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

FISHERIES—(A) CONDITION OF ATLANTIC FISHING INDUSTRY
(B) REPORTED PROPOSAL TO REDUCE NUMBER OF EXPORTERS
(C) PRE-BUDGET DISCUSSIONS

Hon. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleagues will remember, on January 26, as reported at page 14319 of *Hansard*, I asked questions, first of the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Rompkey) and then of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. LeBlanc) with respect to what was going to happen in the town of St. Anthony in Newfoundland in view of the closing of the plant which Fishery Products Limited said was unavoidable. It is common knowledge, Mr. Speaker, especially to members on the other side of the House from Newfoundland and Labrador, that the fishery industry is in very great difficulty, not just in Newfoundland but on the whole Atlantic coast.

When the news came that Fishery Products Limited would have to close the plant at St. Anthony, it was very bad news, indeed; not just to members of this House and people concerned about the situation in the Atlantic fishery, but, of course, to the people in St. Anthony.

In that small town the company employs 950 people at peak season and over the season buys from approximately 3,000 fishermen. The 950 people employed in the plant at peak season represent about one fifth of the population of the town. It goes without saying that all members of the House are and must be concerned about the situation.

When I put these questions in the House, first of all to the Minister of National Revenue in whose riding St. Anthony lies, he demurred that it was not a proper question to put to him. When I asked what he was going to do about it he said, and I quote:

Madam Speaker, if you intend to allow that question I will simply say that I have represented St. Anthony for ten years and I do not intend to stand by and see the people of St. Anthony suffer in any way.

That is the retort of the minister to my question on January 26, 1982, about the future of the people of St. Anthony.

When I asked the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans if he was going to solve the problem with money and, if so, how much he was going to spend and what his plans were, he said:

Madam Speaker, the hon. member's rhetoric should remind the House that he has discovered Newfoundland in the last month.

That is a comment that the hon. minister could only make once; it would not be accepted twice. I have to ask if the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has discovered St. Anthony.

We are faced with a very serious situation. On January 30 the minister of fisheries for Newfoundland and Labrador was reported in the press as saying that the matter would be referred to Mr. Michael Kirby who is heading a task force to inquire into the difficulties on the Atlantic coast. Before that

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the Minister of National Revenue had said that some high level meetings would have to be held to see what could be done. How long can the people in St. Anthony—or any other place—wait for the government, which knew full well that the problems which now face the Atlantic fishery were on their way, to take action. As others have asked, well-intentioned though the terms of reference of Mr. Kirby's task force are, can he act in time?

Statements have been issued by officials of Fishery Products Limited to the effect that not only can the plant not continue for the winter months but it may not be able to open for the summer fishery. When I asked the question on January 26, I was not just indulging in political rhetoric, as the two ministers apparently believed. I asked a serious question; what will be done? I remind the House that the hon. Minister of Fisheries and Oceans went on to say, after he had gone through the motions of rebuking me for having the nerve to ask what would happen to the people of St. Anthony, and after he spelled out a few things which had been done by way of vague promises with respect to other problems in Newfoundland:

• (2205)

The matter of St. Anthony is more recent. We are looking at this subject, and I might tell the hon. member that he really should go to Newfoundland again. He might learn something else.

I see a distinguished member of the House from the province of Newfoundland here tonight. I want to say that I am still asking my question, and that I would like someone on the government side to tell us just exactly what is going on. Does the Kirby task force have this problem? Is it seized with the obligation to bring about an answer? Has the hon. Minister of National Revenue come up with an answer? Has the hon. Minister of Fisheries and Oceans come up with an answer? If hon. members opposite tell us tonight that they have an answer, that these people will not be unemployed and that these fishermen will have a place to sell their fish, I will be the first to commend them. I think we are entitled to an answer, and we are entitled to an answer tonight.

Mr. Brian Tobin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, at the outset, and in reply to the questions of the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Fraser), it is important that it be noted that the problems of St. Anthony did not evolve or develop in the last few months. I had an opportunity to speak to the president of the company. He informed me that we should take into account the cost of capital expenditure, which is the cost of improving or moving new technology into the plant over the past four or five years and add to it the net loss since 1977, giving us a total loss of nearly \$10 million. This problem has not dropped out of nowhere, at the last second, as a result of any changes or lack of administration in the last few months, on the part of the Department of Fisheries. It involves a very fundamental investment decision and marketing approach by a company and the subsequent results. I say on behalf of the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Rompkey) and on behalf of a local