

Oral Questions

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the seriousness with which the member asks this question, I do, however, disagree with his premise because this program is especially designed for people with an attachment to the fishery. I have reviewed this very carefully in response to questions that have been asked before and people have already qualified under the extended criteria.

I want to point out one aspect that he may be missing and that is that in any community, where most people engaged in the fishery are unable to meet the criteria, a person who can demonstrate, within that community, a continuing legitimate attachment will be considered for eligibility. I should say that this approach we are taking has been accepted by people in the industry, both labour and management, and we are making accommodations for a range of needs within the industry.

Mr. Tobin: Mr. Speaker, despite the words of the minister, despite the attempt to assure members of this House and through this House Canadians that this program is working, in my constituency alone, on the great northern peninsula, over 50 per cent of the fishing families affected have had essentially no income since May 15. The member for St. John's West, the minister from Newfoundland, knows that and the parliamentary secretary, who is from Newfoundland, knows that, and the minister knows it.

My question is directed to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, who chairs a cabinet committee on what has been acknowledged by the government as a crisis in the fishery. Given that fishing families can expect no help from the Minister of Employment and Immigration, can expect nothing but a cancelled Christmas this year, a bitter pill for their Christmas dinner, will the minister intervene, on behalf of these families who are being told that they have nowhere to go whatsoever but to welfare and nothing to do but move to Toronto and take a minimum wage job? Will the minister help them now?

Mrs. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, we have said all the way along that it is our view as a government that we want to

help people who are affected by this very special problem.

Let me just quote, if I may, the Minister of Fisheries of Newfoundland who seems to disagree with the hon. member. The fisheries minister of Newfoundland, Walter Carter, said that the \$5 million federal emergency response program for the fishery will be adequate to look after the fishermen who need assistance.

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IMMIGRATION

Mr. Dan Heap (Trinity—Spadina): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. The minister is quoted in *The Globe and Mail* today as saying that she is satisfied with the new refugee system the way it is. I want to ask her, considering that out of 15,611 claimants, 5,603 have not started their claims, 2,985 are waiting for a full hearing and 2,301 are listed as adjourned, postponed or pending, can the minister tell this House why she has allowed a total new backlog of 10,889 to develop, two-thirds of the whole, and how she intends to overcome it?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I would certainly dispute the numbers that the hon. member is putting forward today. I think what is very important to know is that as of October 31, there have been 15,000 new claims.

The program was a little slower getting started than I had hoped in the beginning, as people were being trained. I think that the members of the refugee determination system have been very conscientious in how they have viewed these cases. However, we have seen some improvement in the last few months. We are watching it very closely to ensure that the system does work and that that catch-up on the new cases continues.

Mr. Heap: Mr. Speaker, since the figures are from the minister's own board of IRB, she had better look at them again because Canadians are asking why she is allowing a new build-up. They want to know whether she is putting forward a list of so-called safe countries to which refugees will be sent back without a full hearing and whether the United States is on the list of safe countries for refugees from El Salvador.