

Business of the House

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Madam Speaker, I am not an expert in GATT or trade matters. I know it is under the heading of health that the United States administration—and not just this one but previous ones—has gone along with this ban on Canadian swordfish. I will certainly take up with my colleague, the Minister of Trade, the approach suggested by the hon. member. It may have some merit.

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FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS

AMOUNT OF TRANSFERS TO PROVINCES

Mr. Hal Herbert (Vaudreuil): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the President of the Treasury Board. Last week I received from the Minister of Finance a confirmation that fiscal transfer payments to the province of Quebec for the equalization program alone during the current fiscal year had increased by some \$400 million, from \$1.7 billion to \$2.1 billion, yet in the news release of the President of the Treasury Board yesterday he shows supplementaries totalling \$276 million for fiscal transfer payments, of which \$124 million is for the Canada Assistance Plan. I wonder if the President of the Treasury Board can explain this major discrepancy in transfers to the provinces during this current fiscal year.

● (1200)

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, the news release which I issued yesterday accompanied the tabling of Supplementary Estimates (E), the final supplementary estimates for the current fiscal year. They reflect the numbers to which the hon. member for Vaudreuil refers, namely, \$152 million in fiscal transfer payments due to a revision of fiscal equalization payments, and \$124 million under the Canada Assistance Plan. They do not take into account what might have been included in prior supplementary estimates which have been tabled.

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

REFLECTIONS ON RECENT EVENTS

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Madam Speaker, before asking the question on House business, on behalf of my colleagues I should like to associate this party with your remarks of yesterday when you said that we have all come through a trying period. Without being specific, I would like to say that a few of us in this House are still going through a trying period. On behalf of my party I would like to express, as you did yesterday, our appreciation for the work of the officials and employees of the House who put in long hours during the last couple of weeks.

Also on behalf of my colleagues, I would like to say that we support the attitude taken by the Chair during these weeks. It

was essential, for the neutrality of the Chair, to remain totally apart from the struggle between the parties. We feel that you did this, although I must confess that I was a little puzzled by some of the remarks attributed to you in TV transcripts, especially those referring to the possibility of motions appealing a Speaker's ruling, which were abandoned by the House 17 years ago. But, as I say, we felt your attitude was appropriate and along with everyone else we were happy to see the issue put aside and Parliament back to work.

For this reason we were surprised when the Chair decided to make extended comment on this very sensitive situation yesterday. I again speak on behalf of my colleagues when I say that we felt those comments were very broad in exploring the many procedural questions relating to the ringing of the bells, but we are not convinced these questions can be raised in a neutral way if no reference is made to the issue of the omnibus bill which caused our protest in the first instance.

We felt, and continue to feel, that extraordinary intrusions into the rights the opposition exercises on behalf of Canadians, require extraordinary measures of defence. We feel it is very unlikely that a government would borrow this tactic, as you feared, because the government is equipped with a guillotine rule, a closure rule, supply guillotines, and a myriad of other rules which make life easy for governments and difficult for oppositions.

We were completely at ease with the idea of defending our strategy in partisan debate against all comers. However, we hope that if the use of the bells in this case is to be the subject of comment from outside the arena of partisan combat, then the use of omnibus bills will in future also cause the Chair to raise questions, review precedents, and consider its course of action with very great care under new circumstances.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

WEEKLY STATEMENT

Mr. Nielsen: May I ask the government House leader what the business of the House will be for Monday? The Minister of Finance appears to have disposed of that already but I should like confirmation from the President of the Privy Council.

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, what the Minister of Finance said was that among the budget bills, fiscal arrangements had high priority and I agree with him. I know that my hon. colleague is trying very hard to allow us to change the order of the day on Monday. What we agreed upon was to negotiate in good faith for six days, which will expire only at three o'clock on Monday. I hope that as a result of those negotiations we will be able to replace Bill C-94 with the bill that will be introduced in a few minutes, but for the time being the order of business for Monday is Bill C-94, the bill on energy security.