

Oral Questions

[Translation]

APPARENT RENUNCIATION OF SOVEREIGNTY OVER ARCTIC WATERS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Secretary of State for External Affairs also stated in this House, that same day, September 10, 1985, that the Government would immediately enact a bill empowering it to apply Canadian law in our Arctic waters.

Now, two years and three months later, the House has yet to see that legislation.

Instead, we have a secret deal with the United States that does not expressly recognize our ownership of those waters, our sovereignty over the Arctic, but instead that gives the Americans access to our Arctic waters. The United States are not asking Canada for permission to send their ships into our waters, they tell us when and how they will be using our Arctic waters.

Here is my question to the Minister: Why does the Government of Canada accept to give up our sovereignty rights over Arctic waters?

[English]

Hon. Pat Carney (Acting Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am perplexed by the Right Hon. Member's repeated statement that this is a secret deal. Our negotiations with the Americans have been known and have been ongoing for some time, and have been made public on many occasions by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for External Affairs. There is no secret deal. There are ongoing discussions. When we come down to the point of consent, that is precisely what the current proposal would achieve. The Americans have never, ever conceded the Canadian demand that we have to consent to passage through the Northwest Passage.

In the proposals regarding ice-breakers, which are being discussed, the Americans would have to seek and get Canadian consent before ice-breakers could traverse the Northwest Passage. That is what Canada has been trying to achieve, and that is an exertion of our sovereignty.

CANADA-UNITED STATES NEGOTIATIONS

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Minister cannot have it both ways; the document can't be leaked, and yet not have a secret deal. The Minister can work that out when she has the opportunity.

I have always said that the trade agreement between Canada and the United States put Canadian sovereignty at risk. It is ironic that before the ink is dry on the final text of the trade agreement, if there is a final text, that the Government of Canada was secretly negotiating away our sovereignty in the Arctic. It has not escaped the attention of Canadians that the Arctic sell-out was being negotiated at the same time as our trade sell-out.

● (1425)

I want to ask the Minister, and perhaps it is not coincidence that she stands to respond to the question: was the price of this trade deal, a final text for this trade deal, the selling out of our sovereignty in the Arctic?

Hon. Pat Carney (Acting Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Right Hon. Member that I am speaking in my capacity as Acting Minister, in the absence of the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

I can assure him, once again, that the proposals which are being discussed and to which the Member has referred assert our sovereignty. They exercise our sovereignty. They would require the Americans to acknowledge that they have to seek our consent before sending a *Polar Sea* through the Northwest Passage.

I know something more about the Northwest Passage than the gentleman opposite, Mr. Speaker, and I can assure you that what is being proposed by the Canadians, that before the Americans could ever send an American *Polar Sea* through our Northwest Passage they would have to seek and they would have to get our consent, is the exercise of sovereignty, not the benign neglect that the former Liberal Government gave to our North.

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HEALTH

TOXIN TAINTED MUSSELS—RELEASE OF INFORMATION

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Last Friday the Minister of Health tried to explain his gross negligence in delaying a public alert to the poisonous mussels by saying that he was awaiting tests from his Department. Now we know that lab animals actually began dying on November 27, four days before the Government issued a public alert.

Why did the Minister place the health of Canadians at risk by keeping the real mussel story secret?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I did not keep any story secret. I have been very up front about this issue. I have all the details here, day by day, hour by hour, but for brevity in the House let me put it this way.

On Sunday, a week ago yesterday, the Government, through the Department of Health—

Mr. Tobin: Goodbye, Jake.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, I hope Hon. Members think that this is serious enough, especially the Hon. Member