

Oral Questions

Mr. Leggatt: I asked my question because I wanted to know how the Prime Minister feels about these two standards. If the chief justice of Quebec is not given terms of reference relating to what he shall study and report on, how can the Prime Minister rely on that report in terms of anything other than what the judge says vis-à-vis the courts? What about the political ramifications of this whole affair? I ask this, since the Prime Minister has now closed his options with regard to the conduct of his own ministers.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I am sure the hon. member for New Westminster will be the first to agree that his question was largely argument.

POSSIBILITY OF NEW TRIAL FOR KEITH LATTA—
GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, may I change the subject and direct a question to the Minister of Justice which relates to his ministerial discretion to order a new trial in a certain case? Will the minister order a new trial for Professor Keith Latta, of Queen's University, who was convicted of murder? I ask this as I understand that Department of Justice officials, the police of Edmonton, the defence attorney involved in the case and others are to meet with a certain witness, Sylvia McCauley, alias Le Tendress, to determine facts which were either suppressed at the trial of Mr. Latta, who is convicted of murder, or which came to light after the trial was completed. It is alleged that she knew certain facts which were suppressed during the trial. I ask, is that meeting taking place and will the minister, at his discretion, keep the door open for Mr. Latta, so that there may be a new trial of this matter?

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether the precise meetings to which the hon. member refers are taking place, but discussions are going on between my officials and authorities in Alberta for the purpose of making recommendations to me, or rendering advice to me as to whether a new trial should be ordered or other procedure undertaken pursuant to section 617 of the Criminal Code. As I explained to the hon. member previously, I hoped to make a decision before now, but have not.

POSSIBILITY OF NEW TRIAL FOR KEITH LATTA—REQUEST FOR
ASSURANCE WITNESS NOT SUBJECT TO DURESS

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a most serious supplementary question to the minister? Apparently the witness signed a statement, but the evidence came to light after the trial ended and the appeal procedure was completed. As she signed the statement, will the minister make certain that no pressure is brought to bear on the witness and that she is not put under any duress to change her statement. This is a most serious matter affecting Mr. Latta, and there are some grave irregularities which could affect all in this House.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

[Mr. Leggatt.]

Mr. Woolliams: Mr. Speaker, I do not know why hon. members opposite are hollering. This is an important matter involving the life and liberty of one of our country's citizens.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I was under the impression the minister was about to answer.

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member. The question is serious and the matter is serious. I think I am properly entitled to assume that the appropriate authorities in Alberta will not apply duress which the hon. member suggested might be applied. I understand that interviews with Mrs. McCauley would be conducted in the presence of an officer of my department. One of his duties and obligations would be to assure that no duress is applied.

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● (1450)

FISHERIES

EFFORTS TO ADVISE GREENPEACE ORGANIZATION ON
CONSERVATION

Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of State for Fisheries. Now that the Greenpeace organization has shown the good sense not to interfere with the seal hunt by marking the seals, possibly because the minister amended the sealing regulations, for which he should be commended, but more likely because 200 Newfoundlanders stopped them, may I ask the minister this question: since the Greenpeace organization is now turning its efforts toward the whole area of conservation, and since it is obvious they do not know anything about conservation, what action is the minister taking to educate or advise them?

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Minister of State (Fisheries)): I thank the hon. member for his kind words. I always thought that anyone who spent a couple of days in Newfoundland would better understand something, and they have in this case. I see through press reports that the leader of the New Democratic Party, who also spent a couple of days in Newfoundland, supports our position.

I would say to the Greenpeace organization—and I do not doubt the sincerity of their minds and hearts—that if they do want to discuss conservation there are avenues open to them, including a committee of advisers on seals, chaired by Professor Ronald, who is not an employee of the government. This committee has gone along, with some doubts, with the hunt this year on condition that we be very careful, and carefully assess the stocks for next year. This, we shall do. I rejoice that the confrontation which seemed to be on the horizon may not take place. I hope everyone is very cautious since the ice is dangerous. I also hope that the Greenpeace movement will take advantage of the fact that the parliamentary committee on fisheries and forestry is sitting in the next few days. If they want to attend and be heard or discuss matters with the officials, we are perfectly open to that.