

Oral Questions

Mr. Tobin: The province has not seen such a commotion since former Premier Frank Moores fired off dynamite on both sides of the Strait of Belle Isle commencing a \$1 billion hydro tunnel project. Frank Moores was re-elected, but to this day we have not seen the hydro tunnel project.

With this in mind, I want to ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the following words contained in the document released this morning in St. John's, Newfoundland, by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and Premier Peckford, mean:

The execution of this Statement of Principles by the signatories hereto is not intended to and does not create legally enforceable rights or obligations between the signatories hereto or between any of the signatories hereto and any third parties.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister separate himself from the enthusiasm of this photo opportunity for a moment and explain those words to the House and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I find it rather strange that an Hon. Member from Newfoundland would criticize a very important national and regional project that will be good for Canada, good for the Atlantic region, and particularly good for Newfoundlanders. It will generate some 47,000 person-years of employment in Canada, and almost 35,000 person-years in work for Newfoundland.

What has been announced today is a Statement of Principles. That is precisely what it is. The finite details of this will be worked out in a formalized legal fashion.

● (1420)

DEFINITIVE AGREEMENT QUERY

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister says he finds my reaction surprising. I tell him that my reaction, and the reaction of all Newfoundlanders, is born of experience. We heard Premier Peckford announce this project once in 1979, we heard it again in 1982, each time coupled with the calling of an election.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): What's Turner's position on Hibernia? We know what Trudeau's position was.

Mr. Tobin: On both occasions the hopes of Newfoundlanders were crushed and on both occasions many Newfoundland investors lost sizeable amounts of money. How can the Government this morning in Newfoundland describe the announcement not, as the Deputy Prime Minister just said, as a statement of principles, not as a progress report, not as a report card, but as a firm agreement, when in fact, and I quote again from the document:

The signatories hereto will use their best efforts to finalize a definitive agreement or agreements—embodying this Statement of Principles as expeditiously as possible but in any event by March 31, 1989.

That is eight months hence, one day before April Fool's Day. What do those words mean? Will the Deputy Prime Minister answer?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, it is quite obvious the Hon. Member has never been involved in an agreement of this nature.

Mr. Tobin: I would like to be.

Mr. Mazankowski: This is quite usual. This is the way in which a major project of this nature proceeds. When the Hon. Member suggests that there was disappointment in Newfoundland, I can tell him that there was disappointment in Newfoundland when the province lost two court battles over whether in fact it had any share in the ownership. This Government acknowledged there was a partnership in terms of the ownership of those resources, which was enshrined in the Atlantic Accord.

This has been a positive step by step process, and today Canadians right across the country, but particularly in Newfoundland, are welcoming this announcement because it is a good announcement for Canada, it is a good announcement for Newfoundland, and it is a good announcement for Atlantic Canada.

REQUEST THAT NEWFOUNDLAND INVESTORS BE GUARANTEED AGAINST POSSIBLE LOSSES

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister, who should know better, and ordinarily does, now attempts to drag the decisions of the courts into a partisan arena.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tobin: We are talking about the credibility not only of the Government of Canada but the credibility of the Government of Newfoundland which, for the third time, has trumped up a Statement of Principles and called it a definite agreement.

The Deputy Prime Minister has the document the same as I do. Will he now not admit that this statement that I have quoted, these words I have quoted, are an escape clause allowing any one of the partners to walk away at any time from the so-called Statement of Principles announced this morning? If he is not prepared to admit that, if he is not prepared to admit that unassailable fact, will he give an ironclad commitment today to Newfoundlanders and, in particular to Newfoundland investors, that any money they may lose this time, as they have twice before because of a less than forthright statement by politicians anxious for an election call, those losses will be guaranteed by the Government of Canada? Is the Deputy Prime Minister prepared to say that today in the House of Commons?