

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): My hon. friend expresses an opinion to which he is entitled, one which I regret, because I think he is aware of the fact that no one in this House would question the commitment of the Hon. Minister of Fisheries—

An Hon. Member: It is his judgment.

Mr. Mulroney: —to questions of health and safety and environment, well established over many years. Everything was laid out in good faith before the House. I think the responses have been appropriate and adequate.

I was asked this morning whether, in retrospect, we would have acted differently. I think that was the thrust of the context. The answer was, of course, yes. No Canadian wants this, which is why we acted as quickly as we did—

Mr. Deans: After two days of questioning here.

Mr. Mulroney: —to make sure that they were removed and that appropriate procedures were in place for the future.

MINISTER'S RETENTION

Mr. George Baker (Gander-Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister really and honestly believe that he can retain a Cabinet Minister who asks Canadians to eat rancid fish? Does he really and truly believe that?

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An Hon. Member: Silence, silence.

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BANKS AND BANKING

NORTHLAND BANK—PRESIDENT'S PRESS CONFERENCE

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I have a question on another matter. Late yesterday afternoon the president of the Northland Bank held an extraordinary press conference in which he accused the Government of doing just the opposite to what it was publicly and privately committed. He said that instead of helping to facilitate a restructuring of Northland Bank the Government of Canada, through its officials, was taking steps that would really involve the bank in a rapid liquidation of its assets at firesale prices. These are extremely serious allegations coming from the president of a bank. I would like to ask the Minister of State for Finance simply this. What is going on?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of State (Finance)): Mr. Speaker, I was both surprised and I guess a little bit frustrated by the statements that were made by the president of the Northland Bank yesterday. In our discussions I had indicated to him that I would facilitate in any way some proposals which he said were under negotiation as we had our discussions leading up to September 1.

I gave him every room to pursue those discussions. Not only that, but I appointed a full-time liaison person to work from my office with him very early the following week in order to assess the proposals that he was to bring forward to us. That person is one of the top corporate finance people in Canada. I have been in touch with him every day. He has examined every proposal that has come forward, and those negotiations are continuing.

REQUEST FOR WEEKEND MEETING OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): My question is directed to the Prime Minister. What the Minister has just said to the House was effectively denied or contradicted by both the president of the bank and the vice-president of the bank, the two of them together at a press conference yesterday, when they said that the Government was not helping to facilitate the restructuring, and that a couple of offers, among others, were not being seriously considered.

• (1125)

The point at dispute here is the serious allegation involving a bank president going public, something which is extraordinary. He is saying that the Government is not doing what it has committed itself to do but that it is doing the opposite. Given the contradiction that exists between what the Minister has said today and what the bank president has said, without presupposing the accuracy of either but noting their seriousness, will the Prime Minister take immediate steps to hold a meeting of the Finance Committee of the House this weekend, a meeting at which the Minister and the president of the bank in question could appear to give their views?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we have been trying to get the Finance Committee going for about two weeks now and have not met with the kinds of endorsements which I am delighted to hear today. As soon as the House Leaders grant their approval, the Finance Committee can begin sitting so that these matters can be fully examined.

Mr. Fulton: It's sitting every day, Brian.

Mr. Mulroney: I mean in regard to the problems about which we are speaking, obviously. I cannot account for a statement made by a bank president in difficult circumstances and under pressure. The Minister has provided appropriate explanations. Surely the Leader of the New Democratic Party would not quarrel with the proposition that this Government has already gone very far to establish that we were willing to take risks to protect fledgling financial institutions in western Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mulroney: Members of the NDP laugh at what we have done for western Canada but western Canadians will remember that, as will all Canadians. I guarantee that. They laugh