

original name. I was a bit surprised to hear that the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe wants to reverse the course of history and come back to the state of affairs which existed before 1763. He wants our department to simply acquire a parcel of foreign territory. I am slightly surprised by this wild suggestion. Another proposal which also surprised me was that following his first visit to St. Pierre-Miquelon, he certainly took French lessons, for which I want to congratulate him.

He worried because the U.S.S.R. seemed to try to manipulate France and get hold of its port facilities first, and then spread its supremacy. As I know France, however little I know it, I do not worry about its whole autonomy nor about its great shrewdness in dealing with foreign affairs.

[English]

I am therefore convinced that my hon. colleague opposite will go back to St. Pierre and Miquelon, and after a few more summers he will surely get the feel of the people of these islands and he may decide that he would like to see Newfoundland join them, instead of the other way around. However, this is being facetious. I am simply following the line of reasoning that he had introduced into this discussion—to my great surprise, I must admit.

This motion is framed in a way which may be unintentionally misleading since the choice of language implies that with respect to the geographical area mentioned there is an actual "continental shelf boundary dispute" between Canada and France. The word "dispute" is capable of a variety of different interpretations including, in the most negative sense, one meaning that intractable and irreconcilable differences have arisen between both sides and that each side has, as it were, drawn battle lines. I know he referred to 1763, but surely we are in 1976 and there is no such problem now.

While the delimitation of the continental shelf boundary between Canada and France in this area remains to be settled, we on our side hope that agreement can be reached in an amicable and neighbourly way. Indeed, to date consultations which Canada has had with France in this regard have proceeded on the basis of full co-operation between the two countries concerned.

The question of the delimitation of continental shelf boundaries between two or more states whose coasts are opposite one to another, or where the territory of one state is opposite the territory of another—such as in the present case—involves complex considerations of international law.

[Translation]

I too read, and I am no more of a specialist than my colleague the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe but since I have been parliamentary secretary and even before when I was only a member of the Committee on External Affairs and National Defence, I too read many documents issued before or after the third and the fourth Law of the Sea Conference. Since the hon. member has been sitting in this House longer than I, he knows the complexity of this problem much better than I. He also knows that the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacEachen) comes from a so-called maritime province and he knows to what extent he has always been concerned with the improved condition of the Canadian people. He knows

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very well, and I am sure that nothing enables him to suggest that there is the slightest matter for concern in the case he puts forward in this House, which relates to a motion for papers. He may perhaps retort that when one says that the matter is complex one is really trying to hide behind too secretive an attitude, with a view to keeping back information instead of revealing it.

On the other hand, I am sure he will agree in recognizing with me that the mere reading of the papers of consultant geographers, assisted by experts in other fields who make up our law of the sea teams, illustrates without a shadow of a doubt, in the case of the public documents we know, how difficult it would be for laymen like us—and even for specialists, for that matter—to decide lightly that setting the limits of the continental shelf is an easy matter.

He need only refer to the text we studied in Committee on External Affairs and National Defence at the time of the 3rd Conference on the Law of the Sea, held in Caracas in August 1974, and to the paragraph which does not apply here, I believe, to the definition of territories, of archipelagic territorial waters, to know that the problem is decidedly multiple in its aspects, highly technical and very difficult to discuss, all the more so, without a black board and chalk.

● (1730)

[English]

If I come back to the question directly related to the production of documents, namely, the fact that the ongoing conference and the decisions that should be reached there could well have a bearing on any settlement of the continental shelf boundary between Canada and France in the area of St. Pierre and Miquelon thus changing the applicable legal rules presently contained in the 1958 convention on the continental shelf, to which both Canada and France are parties, and which would normally set out the legal guidelines for settling the boundary in this area, the hon. gentleman will agree with me that if we are a responsible government we should not interfere at this time and produce documents which, by the way, cannot be produced.

Canada and France have held discussions on the delimitation of the continental shelf off these two islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. The discussions were held on a confidential basis, as mutually agreed by both sides, given the fact that important questions of rights to seabed and other resources are involved. The last round of consultations took place in 1972, at which time the legal issues were considered. Both sides noted the complexities of the issues involved, and particularly the complicating factor which would obtain should the international community accord coastal states rights to extend their jurisdiction beyond the limits now recognized by international law.

The records of these confidential discussions must, in the interest of Canada's relations with another country, be maintained as non-public documents. It would be wholly inconsistent with our understandings with the French authorities for us to publish materials which contain references to the French position.

Moreover, other material such as letters and telegrams pertaining to the discussions, and which may reflect on the Canadian position to be taken as and when discussions