

Borrowing Authority

borrowing authority, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs.

Mr. Tom McMillan (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-151 now before the House seeks to provide the Government with authority to borrow \$14.7 billion. That money is needed because, as has been the case from the time the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) took office 15 years ago, the Government's uncontrolled expenditures have greatly exceeded its revenues. Indeed, this is the seventh time in the current session that the Government has had to come to Parliament, cap in hand, for additional borrowing authority.

The implications for the Canadian economy of such massive borrowing by the federal Government are as harmful as they are far reaching. The main problem for the Atlantic Provinces is that in the years ahead exorbitantly high interest payments on the national debt will leave little budgetary room for stimulative measures designed to resuscitate the crippled economy of the region.

In particular, I ask how the Government will find the \$500 million that the Kirby Report says is needed for a complete restructuring of the Atlantic fishery. Clearly the state of the fishery on the East Coast is the single most urgent problem faced by the four Atlantic Provinces since World War II. Unless it is resolved, we in the Atlantic Provinces, all four Provinces alike, will continue to be forced to be wards of the federal Government, reduced to living from hand to mouth on the strength of transfer payments to provincial Governments and individuals.

Throughout the Atlantic region, the fishery has a potential work force of something like 100,000 people, about half engaged in the fish processing plants and the other half engaged in the actual catch. Much of the potential, however, is not being realized because the industry is literally on its knees. The fishing season is upon us and a black cloud hangs over those trying to eke out a meagre living from what was once a thriving concern.

The immediate challenge, of course, is to rationalize the small handful of major fish plants that employ the bulk of the 50,000 workers in the fish processing part of the industry. For example, H. B. Nickerson and Sons Ltd., which is of vital importance to Prince Edward Island because of its Georgetown Seafoods plant, at one point had a work force of some 10,000 people. In fact, in Georgetown alone, in that one plant, some 300 full-time jobs were eliminated when the doors were closed in the Fall of 1982. When part-time workers are taken into account, as many as 570 jobs were at stake.

I have been pleading with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. De Bané) and the Government as a whole to help revive Georgetown Seafoods. But those pleas have fallen largely on deaf ears.

• (1530)

Now I would be the first to admit, Sir, that the plant's problems cannot be resolved, cannot be dealt with or addressed, and should not be, in isolation from any over-all

strategy for the Atlantic fishery. By the same token, however, the plant's difficulties should not be totally ignored while a broader solution is being pursued. In fact, the major obstacle to the reopening of Georgetown Seafoods is the lack of high quality fish supplies required for processing and for making the plant profitable. Only a more generous fish quota from the federal Government—and the federal Government is the one with authority in this respect—is keeping Georgetown Seafoods from once more playing an important role in the Island's economy. But in response to overtures from myself and my colleague, the Hon. Member for Malpeque (Mr. Gass), and from the P.E.I. Government for such increased access to fish supplies in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. De Bané) has stubbornly refused even to consider the proposal, arguing that it would dislocate supplies in other parts of the Atlantic region, especially in the Province of Nova Scotia. The Minister's concern is grossly misplaced, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that any assured fish quota for the Georgetown Seafoods plant, even if it involved a transfer of licences from Nickerson's to another operator, would not necessarily jeopardize fish supplies elsewhere in the region.

The Atlantic fishery, Sir, is on its knees. Fish processing plants are closing all over the region. Consequently, there is an oversupply of fish for processing purposes. The Government has had the Kirby Report in its hands for many months, well beyond the point when it could justify procrastination and delay. The report was publicly released on February 17. The Deputy Prime Minister told me in the House, in Oral Question Period, on April 29, that the Government concurred with virtually all of Mr. Kirby's recommendations, including presumably those relating to the restructuring of the fish processing plants. If that is the case, why is action being delayed? Surely there has been ample time to consult with all concerned, among them the companies themselves, the banks, the respective provincial Governments and the workers.

If the fishery were instead located in Ontario and Quebec, central Canada in general, action would long since have been taken. The Government has hinted broadly that it may not be able to afford a master plan for the fishery in the current fiscal year, but it was able to come up with \$200 million out of thin air within 24 hours to save what little was left of the reputation of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) in order to patch up the celebrated budgetary leak a few weeks ago. Why could that money not have been spent instead on the Atlantic fishery? The budget provides some money, I grant you that, to the fishery under general categories like Special Recovery Capital Projects. But as Mr. Kirby has rightly pointed out, what is needed is not a few dollars here and a few dollars there for a wharf or a vessel here or there or wherever; a total strategy designed to rebuild the fishery from the ground up is what is required. I urge the Government to recognize the fact and get on with the job.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I should like to point out that the task will be costly. On the other hand, the cost of not