

I should tell the hon. member that the Minister of Justice stated today that while the provincial government had recently filed a reference to the provincial court of appeal, the questions submitted by the provincial government raise a number of complex issues in addition to the question of jurisdiction in respect of Hibernia. These other matters include the status of inland waters, the territorial sea, and perhaps the interests of other provinces as well. In the view of the Minister of Justice, it was necessary to move rapidly to have the urgent and pressing questions of jurisdiction in Hibernia resolved at the earliest possible date by the highest court, the Supreme Court of Canada. That was the explanation offered today by the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Crosbie: I do not think it is ever necessary for a minister to deceive the House by stating that no decision had been made, and then flying to Newfoundland to announce the decision.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. I think I mentioned the other day that the idea of question period is not to offer comments to all the answers received. The hon. member who was very long in his first question, should please proceed to his question now.

GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the same minister. Would the Acting Prime Minister tell the House why the Minister of Justice met first with the defeated leader of the Liberal Party of Newfoundland who was rejected by approximately 61 per cent of Newfoundland voters? Why did he meet first with him? Of course he and the Liberal Party of Newfoundland have rejected the federal government's course of action. Why have they found it necessary to declare war on the province? When will the government respond to the fair offer of the government of Newfoundland which was made to the federal government on January 25 but was never responded to? Do they think they can bully the smallest province of Newfoundland into a settlement?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): No, Madam Speaker, the intention is not to bully the smallest province at all. The intention is to try to settle—

Mr. Crosbie: How will this settle it?

Mr. MacEachen:—the jurisdiction of Hibernia which, until it is resolved, will constitute a block to the development that we can all foresee for the province of Newfoundland. I should say to the hon. member that in the letter which the Prime Minister sent today to Premier Peckford—

Mr. Crosbie: There was no decision yesterday.

Mr. MacEachen:—he concluded by saying:

Oral Questions

I continue to hope we can resolve our differences over resource management and revenue sharing despite the fact that two legal actions have been launched. In the meantime, while these two court actions proceed, the federal government remains committed to working co-operatively with the government of Newfoundland in order to ensure that current oil and gas activity in the offshore continues.

I assure the hon. member that it is not our intention to bully; it is our intention to work co-operatively with the government of Newfoundland in the way indicated.

Mr. Crosbie: What is the date of the letter?

PROPOSALS MADE BY NEWFOUNDLAND GOVERNMENT

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Acting Prime Minister who will know that this unprecedented legal action will be seen as an affront to the integrity of the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and an insult to the people of Newfoundland; he knows that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. McGrath: I want to ask the minister why the Government of Canada did not respond to the reasonable request of the government of Newfoundland, made as recently as May 4, whereby it once again asked the Government of Canada to set aside the question of ownership during the period of negotiations and permanently, if there was an agreement; and the very reasonable position of the province which called not only for shared management and revenue sharing but for setting aside permanently the question of jurisdiction? Why, in the face of that very reasonable proposal, did the Government of Canada affront and provoke the people of Newfoundland by this unprecedented action?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, that question was also dealt with in the letter of the Prime Minister to Premier Peckford, in which the Prime Minister said:

You have insisted that the federal government agree, in advance of serious negotiations, to set the issue of legal ownership aside permanently and commit itself to a framework for resource management that could produce a stalemate which would not be in anyone's interest.

The Prime Minister went on to say that pre-conditions of that kind obviously make meaningful negotiations quite impossible.

QUERY RESPECTING RESUMPTION OF NEGOTIATIONS

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Madam Speaker, I ask the Acting Prime Minister what is more important, the creation of a stalemate or the development of this very important resource for Canada? This is the question which must be addressed. Does the Acting Prime Minister expect the House to believe that reasonable negotiations can resume in the light of this unnecessary provocation? He knows that there can be no negotiations as long as this question has been