

I ask the government leader to make inquiries as to whether this did or did not happen; and if it did happen, to assure Canadians that it will never happen again. I want to know whether it happened or not.

● (1430)

Senator Roblin: I am not able to confirm or deny a newspaper statement because that is not within the purview of my knowledge, nor, indeed, is it part of my responsibilities. I repeat that the government, of course, does not levy a charge for anyone to see an official or a minister of the Crown. The whole idea is preposterous. What other people do is certainly something that we cannot control, but insofar as my advice would extend, I would certainly advise no Canadian to pay a five cent piece to exercise their undoubted right to meet with ministers of the Crown, and indeed, with other members of the government services from time to time as they require.

DECISION OF MINISTER RE LICENCE

Hon. John B. Stewart: Honourable senators, my question does not refer to the matter of a threshold fee to get in through the open door; rather it refers to the decision of the minister to grant the request.

According to the newspaper story, the Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Oceans said—and this is reportedly a direct quotation from him—that the officials of the department were not prepared to agree to the application of Mr. Snarby to have the licence which was appended to the “Martin & Philip” transferred to another vessel, the “Osprey.”

Nevertheless, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans was prepared to make this transfer. My question is: What considerations did the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans detect which brought him to a conclusion which was opposite to that of the officials in his department?

Senator Roblin: I must tell my honourable friend that I have not had a chance to discuss this matter with my colleague, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. However, as my honourable friend will know from having read the story, that newspaper story did give a reason: namely, an allocation of fishing quota. That was one of the points in the article that dealt with which boat should be approved. It is a question of the number of fish. My honourable friend is shaking his head; he may well be right. I am attempting to recapitulate what I can remember of the story which I also had some interest in reading today.

However, I think it would be wiser for me to take my honourable friend's question as notice, because undoubtedly there are ramifications of this matter of which I am certainly not aware.

Senator Stewart: Honourable senators, as I understand the situation, the fact is that the second vessel was somewhat larger and consequently, if it was to be operated economically, would have to have a larger share of the available fish stock. This, I understand, was one of the reasons why the Department of Fisheries was opposed to granting the request. I think the Leader of the Government has misread the story on that point.

However, I gather from his response to my question and to Senator Theriault's question that the Government of Canada knows nothing whatsoever about any money having been charged in relation to this interview.

Senator Roblin: Honourable senators, we certainly know now, because it has been brought up in this house and it has appeared in the newspaper and, consequently, one must assume that there is some basis for that story. If my honourable friend asks me did we know before, I will tell him that we did not know before. However, what I will do, to ensure that I give an absolutely correct reply, is consult with my colleague, the Minister of Fisheries, and obtain his comments on the questions that have been raised by the two honourable senators.

Senator Stewart: Honourable senators, I thank the Leader of the Government. The story also mentions the Deputy Prime Minister, and states that when Mr. Fraser was asked if Mr. Nielsen had brought this matter to Mr. Fraser's attention, Mr. Fraser replied:

I can't comment on that.

That kind of quotation leads one to think that his answer, if he could comment, would have been “yes.” Could that point be cleared up when the other aspects of this matter are being cleared up?

Senator Roblin: I think if somebody asked me what conversations I had held with some colleague of mine in the cabinet, I would have given the same reply, whether I had had any conversations or not. That is not the sort of matter which one is normally expected to discuss. However, I think that when I bring to the attention of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans the comments made by honourable senators in the house, it will give him an opportunity to make the replies he thinks are appropriate in the circumstances.

Hon. Philippe Deane Gigantès: Honourable senators, my question is addressed to the Leader of the Government, and it is on the same subject. The Thomson newspaper chain, desolate that it has been scooped by the *Globe and Mail* on this issue, has been digging all day and they claim that they have seen a memorandum from the minister to his officials saying, “I know this is going against what we agreed upon, but do it this time, will you, please?” Would the Leader of the Government check into this matter as well while he is checking into the other matters, because it appears to be an admission by the minister of having done wrong?

Senator Roblin: Of course, the defect in which my honourable friend has indulged is that he has taken a quotation from a newspaper and drawn from it conclusions which may not be warranted. I shall give him the same answer that I gave other honourable gentlemen in the chamber who have raised the point. I shall ask the Minister of Fisheries to give me his comments on the quotation. I think it would be a little premature to allege an issue of wrongdoing on the basis of the quotation we have heard.

Senator Gigantès: Honourable senators, to set the record straight, I did not say that the newspaper has written this