

Fishing Industry

By its lack of action this government has allowed the controversy between Canada and the United States regarding the east coast fishing treaty to go on far too long. This treaty is of the utmost importance to our Canadian fishermen, and this government has been dragging its heels. It is allowing a small number of U.S. senators who are members of the U.S. Senate foreign relations committee to block ratification of the treaty which was negotiated in good faith by both countries. I am sure that the majority of American people do not realize that this issue is a source of strained relations between our two countries.

The Liberal government failed to take advantage of the good feelings which were evident earlier this year. Our Secretary of State of External Affairs (Mr. MacGuigan) who, incidentally, is the first external affairs minister to be relegated to the second row, speaks of the inadequacies of the American political system. The issue in this matter should not be the deficiencies in the American system of government. Rather, it should be the ratification of the treaty. We, as Canadians, cannot expect to change their system, so we should be attempting to work with it. Our government should be appealing to all members of the U.S. Senate and pointing out to all senators that non-ratification of this treaty is severely straining relations between us.

Added to the problem is our government's attitude toward the United States. This treaty was negotiated to set up a system of co-management of the fishery for the conservation of the stocks. When it appeared that ratification of this treaty may be in jeopardy, our Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (Mr. LeBlanc) decreed that the Canadian effort would be allowed to increase. This action was taken, supposedly, to show that Canadians will not allow themselves to be pushed around and that we must protect our claims to the fishery.

My concern with this action is that perhaps our goal of conserving our fish stocks for the future may be abandoned. When the treaty was negotiated I am sure that one major consideration in the negotiations was to allow the fishermen to take a maximum amount of fish while maintaining that future stocks will exist. If Canada steps up its effort in the fishery and the Americans retaliate by stepping up their effort, we may find that the only losers in this approach will be the fishermen themselves. If there is too much effort on the resource, the stocks may not exist as required in future years. I plead with the government to proceed carefully because there are literally thousands of people who depend on those stocks to make their living.

Canada should be making this issue of a settled treaty more of a priority. This government appears not to be treating this with the importance it deserves. The fishing community in Canada needs this issue resolved. Any fisherman in Canada today can tell us that fishermen have not been spared by inflation. While operating expenses such as the cost of gear, fuel and maintenance have risen substantially over the years, the fisherman's income has risen much more slowly.

The fishing industry has changed so dramatically over the years that a good fisherman must also be a shrewd business-

man. It is not uncommon for a fisherman to have invested \$250,000 so that he can work to make \$10,000. A vessel which ten years ago cost \$20,000 now costs upwards of \$100,000. One of the purposes of passing Bill C-28 was to allow the government to guarantee loans of up to \$150,000 when, prior to that, the government guaranteed only \$75,000 under the fishing vessel assistance program. During debate on this bill the minister indicated that fishermen historically have been good risks, and he felt that Parliament should pass Bill C-28 because fishermen will continue to be good risks. I agree with the minister, but he is making it more and more difficult for the fisherman to maintain his good reputation.

A fisherman who negotiates a loan does so at a rate which is 1 per cent over prime. Unfortunately the rate of interest the fisherman pays changes every month as interest rates change. We all know that the policy of this government has not been to bring interest rates down but, rather, to allow them to rise steadily. The fisherman, after negotiating a loan, does not know how much he will have to pay back.

When the standing committee was studying Bill C-28 I attempted to introduce an amendment which would set the rate of interest charged to a fisherman at the time a loan is negotiated. This set rate of interest would allow the fisherman to know just how much interest he would have to pay. That way the fisherman would be able to determine if indeed he was going to be a good risk. It is unfortunate that a fisherman may become a bad risk because interest rates skyrocket. He may be put into a position where, through no fault of his own, he cannot meet his obligation. The amendment was not accepted, and the fisherman must continue to take his chances. The amendment was not put through because the government did not want it. Because the government could find a technicality, the amendment was ruled out of order. Once again the federal government missed an opportunity to assist the fisherman in a real way. That was unfortunate for the fisherman.

The most important reason for condemning the government for failing to support the Canadian fishing industry is that the minister consistently fails to create his long-promised revisions in policies. Rather than making decisions, the minister appears to be more comfortable sitting on the fence, and when he makes one of his rare decisions he fails to consult all sectors of the fishing industry.

When our government was in power, the minister's predecessor, my colleague, the hon. member for St. John's East, initiated a full-scale review of fisheries policy. The policy review, which was to be presented in April of this year in the form of a white paper, was entitled "A Fisheries Policy for the Eighties". This review included input from all sectors of the industry including fishermen, processors, unions, provincial governments and the federal government.

In addition, our government defined a licensing policy regarding freezer-trawlers and factory freezer-trawlers, and I challenge the present government to define its policy regarding this issue. I am sure it cannot because it appears that it has no policy at all on this matter.