

bring to a halt the work already under way. This enormous gaping hole in downtown Montreal is what I would call the hole of shame of the Progressive Conservative government, which has decided to commission a study from an eminent Progressive Conservative, the former president of the Progressive Conservative Party in Quebec, an engineer named Dupras. I find it strange that the government is willing to waste public funds by using, as the Minister of Supply and Services, the hon. member for Joliette (Mr. La Salle), has said so well, patronage in Quebec to reward certain Progressive Conservative friends by asking them to find out whether or not this project is useful.

The Minister of Public Works (Mr. Nielsen) knows quite well, even if he seemed to suggest the other day in parliamentary committee that the project was launched without any market study, that he does not have to ask a Progressive Conservative engineer to make a study to know that both provincial and municipal authorities want the Guy-Favreau complex to be built there as planned, that is, in the quadrilateral area bounded by Dorchester, Lagauchetière, Jeanne-Mance and St-Urbain.

Everybody obviously knows that construction workers in Montreal are desperately looking for work. There is no major construction project now under way in Montreal. Finally, recent studies have shown that the vacancy rate in buildings in Montreal was at its lowest level. In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, those are the many reasons fully justifying the Canadian government to undertake and complete the construction of such an important complex for the economic life of Montreal.

● (2205)

[English]

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Minister of Public Works): I am surprised that the hon. member should raise this question again after the answer he was given when he first asked it in the House.

I was astonished on first taking over responsibility for the portfolio of Public Works to find that absolutely no studies had been done as to the need for office space in Montreal and that no studies had been carried out with regard to the economic feasibility of this particular project. So we are left with a hole in Montreal, a hole which says something symbolically about the country—perhaps it could be viewed as the one the previous administration got us into and left us in as a result of its caps-off economic policies. The fact is that no studies were completed.

A study is now under way. The hon. member criticizes me for selecting, as he put it, a member of the Conservative party for the conduct of this study, but I am sure if he is in touch with his political friends in Montreal a little more closely than he was in touch with his own department here—I am informed he was not even on the premises of the Tupper Building where the headquarters of the Department of Public Works is located—if he was, he would know that the firm selected consists of Mr. Dupras, a Conservative, and two other partners, Mr.

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Ledoux and Mr. Primeau, both of whom are known Liberal supporters. That, at least, makes it two to one, with the Liberals in the majority. And as a matter of interest I am sure the hon. member, who I see smiling, is aware of the fact that both Messrs. Ledoux and Primeau are former Liberal workers for the hon. member for Blainville-Deux Montagnes (Mr. Fox) and—who else—the hon. member for Papineau (Mr. Ouellet). So here are two staunch Liberal party workers in a firm appointed to carry out the survey of the economic feasibility of the Guy Favreau complex.

Let me inform the hon. member that if there is economic justification, if there is a need for that project to go ahead, if the Government of Canada is justified in expending the taxpayers' money, it will go ahead. But if there is no need and the economic justification is not there—a position which should have been established by the previous administration by taking appropriate steps prior to deciding in 1972 it would go ahead with the project which it did not start until 1978—another decision will have to be taken on the matter.

The report is due by the end of this month. It will be studied and all the necessary considerations will be given with respect to the economic feasibility of the project. If those add up to a plus position, it will go ahead, but if the study indicates that it would be a waste of the taxpayers' dollars to go ahead with a project which was decided upon without adequate studies being conducted by the former administration, then, I am afraid, the people of Montreal will have to be prepared for a negative decision and will have to find some other way to put people in the construction industry in Montreal to work which will be productive, rather than to build a great edifice which will not be occupied, as the previous administration thought it might be but never took the trouble to find out whether it would be.

● (2210)

NORTHERN AFFAIRS—SETTLEMENT OF ABORIGINAL LAND CLAIM

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): Mr. Speaker, on November 12 I asked of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Epp) if he was going to cabinet shortly with the COPE settlement and if he would recommend approval of the agreement in principle signed by the previous Liberal government on October 31, 1978, or whether he would recommend changes or a postponement of the agreement. The final agreement was to be signed on October 31 of this year. Unfortunately, the minister did not answer my questions, nor has he clarified the issue for COPE which represents the 2,500 Inuvialuit in the Mackenzie Delta.

On October 31 the Inuvialuit, that is, the COPE people, issued a press release in which they said the following:

October 31, 1979 will be remembered as the day when the Honourable Jake Epp failed to meet the moral and legal obligations of Canada to northern native peoples.

On October 31, 1978, the Hon. Hugh Faulkner signed an agreement in principle with COPE respecting their aboriginal claims to land and resources for political and economic self-