

*Oral Questions*

questions about the whole issue of the CF-18s. Would the minister go beyond having an internal inquiry and have a full public inquiry on the CF-18s and their safety?

**Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to address some of the outstanding questions.

There has been the allegation that there has been a reduction—some have suggested by 3 per cent—in the hours flown by CF-18 pilots. That is not accurate. What has been reduced is the number of pilots who are flying. Therefore, the reduction of 3 per cent does not affect fighter pilots and their ability to train.

I am not aware of the problems of the purchase that the hon. member has mentioned. There is a full review done by the standing committee whose responsibility this is over the lifetime of the purchase. This purchase was undertaken in 1979. The Hon. Allan McKinnon was the member responsible for the Department of National Defence when I first recall discussions on CF-18s. We have rectified some problems that were identified. We have communicated with McDonnell Douglas. We have suspended the shipment during the purchase time until some faults that had been identified were corrected.

Again, I say to the hon. member that there is no one more concerned about the safety of the men and women who fly on behalf of Canada than the Air Command, the Fighter Command leaders, and the squadron leaders.

**Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Defence. I am sure that the Minister himself is also concerned about safety and I would not in any way suggest that he is not, nor are the members of our Armed Forces.

But I am also told by my colleague that there has been no reference to the standing committee in six years to discuss the CF-18s. We know that there are double the number of fatalities and accidents in Canada with the CF-18s than there are in the U.S. with the same planes.

*[Translation]*

My question is for the Minister of National Defence. These fighter planes are dangerous; that is obvious. People have died, lives are in danger. Will the minister

announce today that he will immediately cancel low-level tactical training flights of these planes until a public inquiry is held on the CF-18s and the accidents in which these fighters have been involved?

*[English]*

**Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence):** Mr. Speaker, the moratorium is on operational training which will take place in Canada. That moratorium is for the next 48 hours until 0900 hours on April 25.

The hon. member suggests that there has been no scrutiny by the standing committee of the purchase of the CF-18s. The standing committee does the Estimates every year and has every opportunity to ask questions of the minister and the department. The standing committee is the master of its own destiny and can decide what it will do and when it will do it.

**Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Defence. I would hope then, as the minister has outlined, that the standing committee will review the CF-18s and support a public inquiry.

There is another much larger issue. Canada continues to spend millions of dollars building such things as forward operating bases in the Northwest Territories, the need for which has disappeared as has the need for Cruise missile testing and low-level attack training.

Will the minister admit that now is the time for the government to open up to full public inquiry not just the question of the CF-18s but our full defence policy in Canada? We know the 1987 White Paper is outdated. Is it not time now for a public inquiry into the whole defence policy for Canada?

• (1430)

**Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence):** Mr. Speaker, all members of the House recognize the geopolitical change that is taking place in the world and we all welcome it. Some of us may not be as confident as the hon. member that the instability that we see today, caused by these changes, can best be addressed by all of us carrying an umbrella and saying that peace has been declared.