

### Oral Questions

plans in this matter, because there was an accident which took place under certain circumstances which are still the subject of study, I wonder whether the Hon. Member realizes that the Government of Saskatchewan has the power to launch an inquiry to get to the bottom of this issue as well. Actually, there are powers which that Government has, I am told, to launch an inquiry and to reach certain conclusions which are necessary before a plan can be developed.

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### NATIONAL DEFENCE

#### STATE OF NAVAL SQUADRON STATIONED ON EAST COAST

**Mr. Harvie Andre (Calgary Centre):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Defence. Can the Minister confirm that while he was in Halifax on Monday to inspect a naval squadron due to depart that day for exercises in the Caribbean, he first pronounced the navy in super shape and then observed that only two of the five ships in the squadron left the harbour on schedule; that the H.M.C.S. *Fraser*, a 27-year old destroyer, as late as last evening was still tied up to the jetty; that a sixth warship, the H.M.C.S. *Ottawa*, on its way to Florida to be painted, was seen "dead in the water" in Halifax harbour, unable to proceed, and, finally, that the guns on both East Coast supply ships have been removed and the ships could be approached by someone in a rowboat, and sunk? In view of that, could the Minister explain why he echoed his Prime Minister and declared the navy in great shape?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. J.-J. Blais (Minister of National Defence):** Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to thank the hon. gentlemen for his ongoing interest in the Canadian forces.

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Blais:** I would like to say that, judging from his question, he is basing his premise upon, unfortunately, inaccurate press reports. I would have hoped he would have spoken with the Hon. Member for Dartmouth-Halifax East who was with me at that particular time.

**Mr. Andre:** I have. He knew what ship he was on.

**Mr. Blais:** I might point out to the Hon. Member, Mr. Speaker, that of the ships which were slated to participate in the demonstration, there was one ship, the H.M.C.S. *Saguenay*, which was delayed for less than eight hours or nine hours. The other five ships, Mr. Speaker, attended the demonstration in accordance with the schedule. I would like to thank the personnel of all of the squadron for the competence they exhibited in the demonstrations in which they participated, including, Mr. Speaker, the transporting of the press from the H.M.C.S. *Iroquois* to the H.M.C.S. *Preserver* amid six and seven-foot swells during that demonstration.

**Mr. McDermid:** Despite what you have done to them.

**Mr. Blais:** I am sure that the press was impressed by the competence of the Canadian forces personnel.

**Mr. Andre:** My colleague who accompanied you was aware that he was on the H.M.C.S. *Iroquois* with you, even though your comment was about the H.M.C.S. *Huron* at the time.

#### PREPAREDNESS OF VESSELS

**Mr. Harvie Andre (Calgary Centre):** Mr. Speaker, Canadian sailors, as our soldiers, regularly win contests with NATO allies in terms of their competence. So we know it is not the sailors who are at fault. We also have the benefit of many studies, most recently the Senate Subcommittee on Defence, pointing out the atrocious situation of the equipment available to Canadian sailors. Does the Minister not believe that it is somewhat absurd that only 40 per cent of our five ships could get out of the harbour on time? Does he not appreciate that, if we are to have any sort of defence capabilities, he, and his colleagues in the Government, should do something about this atrocious situation, and do it soon?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. J.-J. Blais (Minister of National Defence):** Mr. Speaker, I said initially that I was impressed that the hon. gentleman wanted to further the welfare of the Canadian forces. Based upon his last two premises, he persists in advancing erroneous information. Indeed, 80 per cent of the ships performed in accordance with the schedule. There was one ship which was delayed, as I indicated, until eleven o'clock that evening. I also indicated that I was on the H.M.C.S. *Iroquois*. That is again an indication of misreporting. As the Hon. Member for Dartmouth-Halifax East very well knows, I was on the H.M.C.S. *Huron* last spring, and I knew very well that I was on the H.M.C.S. *Iroquois*—

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Blais:**—and, Mr. Speaker, not only that, but I had the experience which the hon. gentleman did not have, of being able to gauge the excellent comportment of the members of the Canadian forces on the H.M.C.S. *Iroquois* at that particular time.

In terms of how we are dealing with the Canadian forces, Mr. Speaker, you know as well as I that we have just signed a contract for six new frigates and the keels are going to be laid in July of this year. They are going to be delivered, Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the schedule.

I might also point out to the hon. gentleman that we have maintained our 3 per cent—

**Mr. Speaker:** I believe the Hon. Minister has replied. The Hon. Member for Halifax West.

**Mr. Crosby:** Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Canadian navy can colour code its ships so the Minister can tell them apart.

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!