

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Jim Jordan (Leeds—Grenville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment.

The minister is aware of the situation in the harbour adjacent to Massena, New York. Many seaway residents are worried about the environmental damage which could be caused if the safety measures taken do not control the PCB laden silt which will be stirred up as a result of the proposed dredging.

I realize that the minister has stopped the dredging for now. What guarantee can the minister give that she will not allow resumption of any more dredging in the St. Lawrence near Massena until it is proven absolutely safe for the people and the environment in that area?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we did announce jointly yesterday with the Environmental Protection Agency of the United States that there will be no dredging at Massena this year. I can further assure the House that there will be no dredging unless and until the Department of the Environment and myself as minister are satisfied that there is absolutely no risk to the health of Canadians.

There is no dredging this year. If there is any operation next spring, and I want to thank the EPA and General Motors for their co-operation and their assurances, no dredging will take place where there is any risk of any PCB contamination.

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• (1455)

RAIL WORKERS

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Minister of Transport. Early last October as speaker at a dinner sponsored by the western transportation advisory committee, the Minister of Transport made the following comment: "Railway labour with grade eight or nine education cannot be blamed for negotiating excessive collective agreements".

Does the minister realize that his remarks were an insult to the 62,000 rail workers in Canada and is he prepared to make a public apology for his unacceptable and scornful comments?

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for that question because it provides me with an opportunity to explain to him and to the House exactly what was said.

I am from northern New Brunswick. From the time I was a kid I have dealt with railroad workers. I know who negotiated the contracts. I have listened to the stories of the people who returned from the war and had to negotiate contracts with the railway barons in the country.

What I said that night in Winnipeg was that never, no matter how much pressure is exerted on the Minister of Transport, will I ever point a finger at those men who worked very hard with very limited educations to find a way to negotiate collective agreements to protect their rights and to protect the rights of others who worked on railroads in the country.

I said that government had to take its responsibilities and management had to take its responsibilities. I did say, Mr. Speaker, because it was the truth—I remember Bill Dunn telling me exactly this in Tracadie in 1950—that it was very difficult for people with grade eight and grade nine educations to sit with people who were educated and who were in the pay of the railroads of the country and try to negotiate collective agreements to protect their rights.

I said then I would never attack the men who achieved that and I will not now because they did what they had to do to protect their rights.

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GUIDELINES

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, day after day we receive more copies of ethical guidelines for cabinet ministers. None of them appear to be unclear. None of them are contradictory. In fact, the current guidelines from the PCO insist there be no intervening by ministers with quasi-judicial bodies under their jurisdiction. The letter tabled said intervention on it.

Now that the truth about guidelines has become obvious will the Prime Minister admit that he has offended Canadians by stripping his government of its integrity?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I made a speech on Monday and I explained the guidelines, the distinction between the two. I have asked everybody to table the letters and so on.

I think the people of Canada think the members of the Reform Party are just trying to score some political points because they cannot attack the government on its economic policy. They cannot attack the government on the performance of the economy. They cannot attack the government because unemployment is down. They cannot attack the government because the mood of the country is much better than it was a year ago.

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RAIL LINE ABANDONMENT

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. On October 20, 1993, five days before the last federal election, the Prime Minister, then leader of the official opposition, wrote a letter to one of his caucus members.