

that he has left the task of responding to my question to his parliamentary secretary.

**An hon. Member:** That is right.

**Mr. MacDonald (Egmont):** In no way do I want to cast aspersions on the parliamentary secretary, yet it is well known that it is the minister who speaks for the department and who, hopefully, knows what is going on with respect to this serious problem. Our inability over the last few months to obtain satisfactory answers as to what action the government will take with respect to the *Irving Whale* has disturbed extremely not only members of this House but the people of Prince Edward Island and of nearby areas who are still threatened by the persistent danger posed by the *Irving Whale*. I hope the parliamentary secretary, who is here to answer this evening, will be more informative than he was a week ago during the "late show" when he answered a similar question asked by my colleague the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie).

Hon. members will recall that back, I think it was, on the first day of this part of the session, when Parliament reconvened on September 7, I asked the Minister of Transport whether in view of the policy announcement by the government they were going to raise the *Irving Whale* and remove the pollution danger of the oil that was on board. I asked him also what progress report he could make with respect to the raising of the *Irving Lake*, which I understand has been a threat to the coast of New Brunswick for some eight years.

In answering me, the minister said there had been a meeting held five days earlier, in Montreal, on September 2, of potential tenderers for the job of either lifting the vessel or removing the oil from it. He said there had been an on-site inspection arranged for all tenderers so that they would be able to see all the circumstances at first-hand. After that was done, he said, the department would get their proposals but no decision would be made either to remove the *Whale* or to take the oil from it until it was absolutely certain that the maximum amount of protection was provided.

That answer leads to only one conclusion, namely, that the government seemed suddenly to become aware in the latter weeks of the summer that there was a problem. I am wondering what they have been doing and thinking. I know what they have been saying, but I wonder what they have been thinking and doing over the last 12 months. The *Whale* did not sink in June, July or August of this year, it sank more than a year ago, last September.

I wrote a letter during the summer, on July 30, to the minister. In response I received a letter which came after the answer in the House, on September 8 or 9, I believe, in which the minister confirmed pretty much the information that was provided by way of answering the question, telling me that preliminary conversations had been held, that there was no firm indication of the problems which might exist with respect to raising the barge, that there was to be an on-site inspection either directly there or through the use of cameras, and then they would be able to draw up sufficient tender forms so that prospective contractors might submit bids.

It is high time the government gave a clear answer to the people of Prince Edward Island and adjacent areas as to what they have been doing for the past 12 months—not only that, but to begin to give some clear answers as to what steps they intend to take to clear up this serious pollution threat.

I have asked repeatedly since receiving this communication from the minister what the department has been up to during the past 12 months. Is it that they have suffered some form of amnesia and forgotten the problem has existed, in the hope it will go away? Is it that they really do not care, that while they can make speeches which give the impression that they are increasingly concerned about pollution, when they have direct responsibility, as in this case, they really do not want to take decisive action? Or are there areas in this department which really are not competent to deal with the problem? Surely, at least they were reminded by local officials in the province. At least we were given assurances from time to time by provincial ministers that the problem would be dealt with at an early date this spring.

I am wondering on what basis these ministers spoke. On what ground did they continue to feel the federal minister and officials would take decisive action while the weather and climatic conditions were suitable? This evening we need some firm answers and, hopefully, the parliamentary secretary will be able to provide them. I repeat, I am disappointed that the minister has not seen fit to be present to answer the question I have raised tonight and I hope by not being here he is not conveying by his absence a lack of interest, a lack of concern, a lack of willingness to tackle this important problem.

**Mr. Gérard Duquet (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport):** Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that the minister was here a while ago and is out of the House now. But that is not because he does not know what is going on in connection with the *Irving Whale*. The minister knows perfectly well what is the situation concerning the *Irving Whale*, and the only answer I can give the hon. member is in conformity with the facts.

• (10:10 p.m.)

In so far as the portion of the question dealing with the *Irving Whale* is concerned, this matter was dealt with by myself last Monday night at this hour in responding to the hon. member's colleague, the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie).

Briefly, in the limited time which is available, the situation on the *Irving Whale* is as follows. Over the past months every effort has been made by the Department of Transport to gather all useful information about the vessel, its structure, its position on the ocean bottom, temperature factors and data about her which will be imperative in preparation for a successful salvage operation. Pre-tender meetings are now over and an on site inspection has been completed. Tenders are presently being sought from the salvage companies and a final decision to begin the salvage operation will be made only after every consideration is given to the safety factor as well as the timing factor in view of the very uncertain weather conditions on the east coast at this time of year.