

Oral Questions

On Saturday, February 12, the Quebec City daily *Le Soleil* reported that the mayors of the Magdalen Islands were putting on pressure for a new ferry. The same newspaper reported the next day that the Premier of Quebec was urging the federal government to give the work of building the new Magdalen Islands ferry to MIL Davie. This would kill two birds with one stone by reviving the MIL Davie shipyard and providing the Magdalen Islanders with the ferry they need.

Can the minister tell us today whether he is still considering buying a used European ferry as a serious alternative, even though it would create no employment here and its performance in the ice-bound St. Lawrence is questionable?

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the government has a responsibility to provide service between Prince Edward Island and the Magdalen Islands and we will meet this commitment to the people who have long been asking for a ship to replace the *Lucy Maud Montgomery*.

As for building or buying a ship, this is a decision for the government, and we have not yet made a final decision. We are looking at all the possibilities. But the main objective is to provide a safe and efficient service to people travelling between Prince Edward Island and the Magdalen Islands.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans): Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell us today, now, although he answered the same question I put to him on January 26, when he intends to make a decision on this?

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, as far as the decision affecting mainly the Magdalen Islanders is concerned, we know that they need a ship to replace the *Lucy Maud Montgomery*. We will try to come up with a solution.

Of course, the question raised by the hon. member as to whether the ship will be built or bought is one of the criteria to be considered in reaching a decision.

• (1455)

It is a very complicated process. I met with the Quebec Minister of Industry, Mr. Tremblay, and we are discussing the whole issue in order to come up with the best possible solution, taking into account the needs of the Magdalen Islanders and of travellers and also our responsibilities to Canadian taxpayers.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

In a letter sent to the office of the Prime Minister on Monday of this week the chair of Market Choices Alliance, made up of

several farm groups from western Canada, reminded you of your June 9, 1993 promise to call—

The Speaker: Perhaps the member would rephrase the question.

Mr. Benoit: —reminded the Prime Minister of a promise to call a producer plebiscite on the continental barley market issue and to honour the result. The continental barley market would allow farmers and grain marketing companies to compete with the Canadian Wheat Board in North American markets.

Will the Prime Minister honour his commitment to hold this plebiscite and if so when?

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

The quotations referred to which were attributed to the Prime Minister could have been attributed to me and to other members on this side. They were made in the context of an action taken by the previous government to remove barley, at least in part, from the jurisdiction of the Canadian Wheat Board. Subsequently the action was proved to be without legal authority and the subject of a court challenge. The court eventually held that the conduct of the previous government was outside the jurisdiction of the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

It was in the context of the legal dispute that we made our remarks about a year ago now, or last summer, in respect of the desirability of a plebiscite.

Having said that, we are not philosophically opposed to a plebiscite or to the proposition that was put forward by the farm groups referred to in the hon. member's question.

I would caution the hon. member and those farm organizations that we all need to think through very carefully both the procedures and the implications of a plebiscite with respect to this particular farm marketing issue because it is not quite as simple as those who might raise this proposition would lead some to believe.

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CANADA POST

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Don Valley North): Mr. Speaker, the other day an article in the *Ottawa Citizen* stated that Canada Post recently awarded an Australian firm a contract to produce Canadian stamps.

My question is for the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. Could the minister explain to the House the reasons behind this contract being awarded to a foreign country?

Hon. David Dingwall (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Mr. Speaker, first of all let me thank the hon. member for his excellent and, I might add, unexpected question.