

Oral Questions

talks about being terribly open. If he wants to know what I mean by terribly open I can tell him. It means transparent, unfettered and above board.

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the government has gone kicking and screaming into the Somalia commission. We in the Reform Party are the ones who demanded a commission of inquiry.

The Somalia commission, which the minister called only after pressure from this party, is headed by top-notch people and will come to its conclusions in due course. There is a complete abdication of leadership within the Department of National Defence. The Prime Minister's expression of confidence in the minister and the chief of defence staff cannot change that fact.

Officers are named in police reports. They are implicated in criminal activities, falsifying documents and offering incentives to subordinates to commit murder. Does the minister consider these to be examples of good leadership?

Mr. Fred Mifflin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised, disappointed and somewhat disillusioned not only by the tenor of the question but by some of the implications of the question.

The members of the third party talk about calling for this inquiry. I happen to have personal knowledge and I will inform the House of it. Other members will remember when we were in opposition—I want the hon. member to check the records—I asked for this inquiry in April 1993.

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it took two years for the government to act. Originally it wanted an internal investigation. It was only under our pressure that the government opened up the investigation.

The Prime Minister said that these troubles occurred under the previous government. Yet after two years nothing has been done to fix the problems. If the minister knew previously of the evidence that has been revealed this week, he has complicity in covering it up. If he did not know, he is guilty of contempt in the highest order. The minister's management of national defence over the—

• (1130)

The Speaker: In our questions we are making giant leaps. I would ask the hon. member to please put his question.

Mr. Hart: My question: The minister's management of national defence over the past two years has only compounded—

An hon. member: Order.

The Speaker: Please, my colleague, the question now.

Mr. Hart: Will the minister resign?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a little problem today. From watching the hon. member I realize not many of them will be re-elected when they act like that.

The member talks like that about the Canadian Armed Forces which have been an honour to all Canadians. Those Canadians have been doing a great job in Yugoslavia for the past three and one-half years, yet a former member of the armed forces is using those kinds of words about his colleagues who were with him in the army, who have always been a great part of the Canadian strength. We have the best soldiers in the world.

Not long ago I was talking with the President of Croatia and the President and Prime Minister of Bosnia. They told me the best soldiers in the former Yugoslavia were the Canadian soldiers.

When I see a former soldier acting like the hon. member, I know those members will not be back in great numbers after the next election.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

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[Translation]

TRANSFER PAYMENTS

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

The federal government reallocates to the Quebec government, in the form of transfer payments, a portion of the taxes collected from Quebecers. As a result of the numerous cuts made by the federal government, the amounts handed back to Quebec are constantly being reduced, and transfer payments have become an unstable and inadequate source of funds for Quebec.

Does the Minister of Finance confirm that, since 1980, the proportion of Quebec's revenues coming from federal transfer payments, including equalization, has dropped by 28 per cent and that the situation will get progressively worse as a result of the last federal budget given that, by 1997-98, transfer payments from Ottawa will account for only 12.7 per cent of Quebec's revenues?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again—and this is unfortunate—separatists do not have a firm grasp of figures.

At present, while receiving approximately \$29 billion from Quebec, we give that province approximately \$41 billion, which means a net gain of \$11 billion for Quebec. What we must ask ourselves is this: Should Quebec ever achieve independence, what will the separatist movement do to bridge that gap?