

Supply

In my riding, there is an extremely important company which is in jeopardy because of the existing situation. I am referring to the MIL Davie shipyard. In fact, until just a few years ago, this company was the largest shipyard in Canada.

The conversion of defence industries is undoubtedly an important issue for Quebec. As you know, military equipment industries have been experiencing difficulties since the end of the Cold War. It is estimated that, since 1987, the demand on the international market has dropped by close to ten per cent. According to international experts, this drop may very soon reach 25 per cent. In Quebec, since that same year, 11,000 of the 57,000 jobs in that sector have already disappeared.

• (1525)

If there is a company which illustrates the urgent need to convert military industries, it is the MIL Davie shipyard. One year ago, the company developed a business plan to switch from military to civilian production. This plan is not only designed to give back to MIL Davie its status of best shipyard in Canada, but also to make it a leader at the international level. The plan includes two transitional contracts. One concerns the construction of a ferry for the Magdalen Islands, for which there is a demonstrated need, while the other provides for the construction of a multi-purpose strategic ship for peacekeeping missions and environmental interventions, called "smart ship".

Unfortunately, the shipyard and the thousands of related jobs are in jeopardy because of this government's apathy. MIL Davie urgently needs to convert to civilian production, since this shipyard is among those Quebec industries which rely the most on military contracts.

Let me give you some interesting data compiled by the Groupe de recherche de l'industrie militaire et de reconversion, which is affiliated to the Université du Québec à Montréal. Until now, 91 per cent of MIL Davie's production has been related to military equipment contracts. MIL Davie is also in fourth place among the 16 companies identified by the UQAM group, after Oerlikon, which has so far been dependent on the military market for 100 per cent of its production, as well as Paramax and SNC Technologies, which depend on that market for 95 per cent of their production. Yet, the Liberal government only offers lame excuses to justify the delaying of its decision on the transitional contracts for the Magdalen Islands ferry and the "smart ship".

The latest of these excuses is the one provided by the Minister of Transport who, in early March, demanded a copy of MIL Davie's business plan before making a decision concerning the two contracts. But, as I said earlier, this business plan has been available for a year already.

Obviously, before making such a decision, the government must ensure that there is a real need for these ships. However, that need has been demonstrated in both cases.

Let us first look at the Magdalen Islands ferry. The useful life of the ferry which has been in use for over 28 years, the *Lucy Maud Montgomery*, will end in less than two years. After that, the ship will not be safe enough to get its certificate of seaworthiness, which is required by the federal government.

The Magdalen Islanders also consider that the *Lucy Maud Montgomery* is bad for business in their area, because the ship no longer meets the needs of the people. For example, the tweendeck is not high enough to accommodate some types of trailers and trucks.

On February 11, the mayors of the Magdalen Islands communities toured MIL Davie main dockyard, the only world-class dockyard in Quebec for now. All of them unanimously recognized the need to replace the *Lucy Maud Montgomery*. On February 22, these same mayors and representatives of the Coopérative de transport maritime et aérien, the company operating the ferry service, reached a consensus and all agreed that a new ferry was needed.

I am going over all of this because there seems to be some confusion created by the hon. member for Bonaventure, among others, about the possibility of replacing the ferry by a used ship. In January, and more specifically on January 18, the day after the opening of this session, the minister of Transport stated, in answer to questions put by our colleague, the hon. member for Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans and myself, that, where the Magdalen Islands ferry was concerned, an announcement would be made soon. Following pressures made by stakeholders, we were told that when the minister said soon, he really meant a couple of months. That was on January 18.

• (1530)

The only other time I heard the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine comment on this very important issue for his constituents was in an article run by the local newspaper, *Le Radar*. The hon. member had nothing else to say but complain that the whole issue of the ferry service was his responsibility, not the responsibility of the Bloc Québécois.

To tell the truth, he must have been outraged by one of the headlines in a previous issue of *Le Radar*, where it was said that never before had the Magdalen Islands been talked about so much since the arrival of the Bloc Québécois in Ottawa. If I had been the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine I would have felt piqued as well.

Nevertheless, March and April have come and gone. We are still waiting for an answer while the workers are being laid off by the hundreds and while Magdalen Islanders are wondering what their member and their government are doing.