

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Nielsen:** Madam Speaker, let me ask this question of the Minister, to see if we cannot get around this impasse. I presume that he answered the Prime Minister's queries on February 16 as Minister of Finance, with respect to the keeping of his records in connection with this affair. He gave information to the Prime Minister which subsequently turned out to be false. That was later corrected by the Prime Minister some seven days later.

My question to the Minister in his capacity as Minister of Finance is why did he sit there day after day, for a week, and not correct that misinformation through the Deputy Prime Minister, or even himself?

**Madam Speaker:** I am sorry. That is the same question. The fact that it is prefaced by saying "as Minister of Finance" does not change anything as to the reality of the fact. I cannot allow the Hon. Minister to answer that question. I am sorry.

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**ENERGY****OIL RIGS DRILLING OFF NEWFOUNDLAND—DANGER OF ICE CONDITIONS**

**Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East):** Madam Speaker, I wish to direct a very urgent question to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. This afternoon in the area of the Hibernia oil fields on the Grand Banks they are anticipating 70 knot winds and seas in the range of 45 feet to 50 feet. Those are precisely the seas that prevailed when the *Ocean Ranger* went down. The ice conditions are still unclear because of the closing down of the tracking station at Shoe Cove by this Government a week ago. They are unable to get accurate information as to the movement of ice. We do know that there are substantial icebergs in the area of the rigs.

Can the Minister satisfy the House why he countermanded an order of the Newfoundland Government—two orders issued to Mobil last week—to cease drilling and have the rigs return to port because of weather conditions, unusual ice conditions, and its concern over the adequacy of search and rescue in the area? Why is the Minister playing fast and loose with the lives of offshore workers?

**Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources):** Madam Speaker, I think the Hon. Member is exaggerating. For years we have had a system whereby there was a meeting of provincial and federal public servants to monitor the situation whenever there was a problem. Last week my senior official was in Newfoundland in the afternoon discussing these problems with the officials of the Newfoundland Government. There was no mention of any problem at that time. A few hours later there was an order issued unilaterally—without even discussing it with our officials—by the Government of Newfoundland, without any consultation with the federal Government. It was evident that this was a great departure from the procedures which were followed in the past.

I have asked my officials to advise me. I have asked the Department of National Defence which is involved in search and rescue, Environment Canada, and any other agency involved, to tell me what the situation was. The report I received last week was that there were no such special conditions last week that necessitated calling them back to shore.

There was a meeting yesterday afternoon in St. John's between the company and people of my Department. The company had also invited provincial civil servants to be there. They refused to come.

As I say, we are very much concerned about the security and safety of the people who work there. We are monitoring the situation at this time. I am afraid that the action by Mr. Marshall last week was just an attempt to score some points, and he did it contrary to the procedure that has been established for a long time. Even yesterday, when in good faith my officials were there and the company people were there, the Government of Newfoundland did not want to have anyone there to ascertain the facts and not try to score political points.

**Mr. McGrath:** It is the Minister who is trying to score points because, until this matter is finally resolved by the Supreme Court of Canada, he has to be responsible for decisions he has taken. The decision he has taken is to overrule the Newfoundland Government which exercised its authority on the moment—because we cannot tell when the wind is going to come up—to order the rigs back in.

**REQUEST THAT RIGS BE ORDERED BACK TO PORT**

**Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East):** Madam Speaker, I want to say to the Minister that it is a very hostile environment and lives are at stake there. He can play fast and loose with the facts on "Coalgate" but he is not going to play fast and loose with the lives of Canadians in that hostile environment. In light of the latest forecasts showing 70 knot winds and 50-foot seas, and in light of the inadequate search and rescue support because the aircraft are not there, will he now agree to order Mobil to bring those rigs in right away?

● (1450)

**Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources):** Madam Speaker, this morning I had a chance to review the situation with my Deputy and other officials. There is a group in St. John's which is monitoring the situation. The figures used by the Hon. Member are not the same as those of the various Department officials who have responsibility for that area and who are as preoccupied as anyone in the House concerning the lives of the people who work there.

Safety and security are my main concern. However, this morning the experts informed me that, in their view, the condition is no worse today than it was two weeks or a month ago. It is still winter and conditions are still difficult, but we are operating under the guidelines which have been in place for a long time. The people who have tried to deal with the situation, to ascertain some jurisdiction, were from the Newfoundland Government. For the first time in years, concerning