

*Oral Questions*

Considering the contents of this report, is the minister prepared to institute an immediate inquiry to determine the cause and extent of the problem and propose remedial action to avoid a burnt out army?

• (1435)

**Hon. David M. Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I find it odd that the hon. member wishes me to institute an inquiry based on one memo.

The hon. member was a member of the joint committee of the House and Senate that looked into all aspects and operations of the Canadian Armed Forces. He signed a report concluding that the leadership of the armed forces was top flight.

Now he comes forward based on the contents of one memo, perhaps generated by the very emotional situation of the closing of the Canadian airborne, and wishes to reverse the assessment to which he subscribed less than three months ago. That is not logical.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**IRVING WHALE**

**Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment. In December 1993, officials of the Department of the Environment gave their minister an internal document which seriously called into question the conclusions and quality of the study on which she based her decision to refloat the *Irving Whale*.

Was the Minister of the Environment aware of that document and will she tell us why she picked the most risky and controversial solution, which was to raise the *Irving Whale*, despite her officials' advice?

**Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the only one who thinks this is a controversial issue is the company that did not land the contract. What is truly unfortunate for the hon. member opposite is that people called her leader regarding this issue when he was environment minister, and he held public hearings into the matter in Halifax, Dartmouth and on Prince Edward Island, yet took no action.

As soon as we came to office, we acted and we hope to raise the *Irving Whale* this summer at the very latest.

**Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am speaking to the Minister of the Environment who, at present, is the only one responsible for the Department of the Environment, and who is the one who must make the right decisions.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mrs. Guay:** How can the minister explain her steadfast refusal to have an electronic inspection of the barge's hull done before raising it, which the experts say is the very minimum

which must be done to prevent a major ecological catastrophe from occurring if the *Irving Whale* were to break up during the operation?

**Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had read the documents I provided, all of the material in the public domain, including the 1990 report asking the former minister to take action, she would know that we did have an electronic inspection done last June.

[English]

What I find incredibly obscure about the logic of the hon. member is that a few months ago she stood in the House and said we should not wait until next spring. We have to lift the *Irving Whale* this year. Now that we are moving ahead and have gone to tender, she completely reverses the position she took only a few months ago.

I took a position, unlike her leader. I am going to raise the *Irving Whale* and finally we will get rid of the ticking time bomb that has been there for 25 years.

\* \* \*

**LABOUR**

**Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I have been informed the government has finally agreed to Reform's demands for back to work legislation in the current west coast labour dispute.

This addresses the immediate problem for Canadian shipping. What is the Minister of Labour prepared to do to prevent further disruptions?

[Translation]

**Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Labour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in fact the situation has worsened in British Columbia ports. As of midnight last night, there was a complete work stoppage, as hon. members are aware. Yes, since midnight yesterday, the transportation of grain and perishable goods has been halted. In the face of the enormous economic consequences of this problem, the government has decided to act and implement back to work legislation.

We are currently negotiating with the various parties to ensure this legislation is adopted as quickly as possible. I hope that we will obtain everyone's agreement.

• (1440)

[English]

**Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the minister on her move.

What is needed now is final offer binding arbitration, as put forward in our private member's Bill C-262. Will the minister make a commitment today to support Bill C-262? If not, will she present similar legislation of her own?