

Oral Questions

[Translation]

SHIPBUILDING

INQUIRY WHEN SIX FRIGATES WILL BE BUILT

Mr. Ernie Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Supply and Services. The Minister knows full well that Government decisions concerning the award of contracts for ship building and maintenance contribute to exacerbate regional antagonisms. The fight over the second part of the frigate contract is proof positive of that. My question is this: When will the Government finally decide to make up its mind concerning the construction of those six frigates?

Hon. Michel Côté (Minister of Supply and Services): Of course, Mr. Speaker, the decision has yet to be made. A number of bids are now under review and an announcement will be made when Cabinet reaches a decision.

● (1450)

[English]

REQUEST THAT MINISTER OF FINANCE MEET REPRESENTATIVES OF SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

Mr. Ernie Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Finance my supplementary question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. Undoubtedly the Deputy Prime Minister is aware that the Minister of Transport announced in the last few days the refit of Coast Guard vessels in his Province of Newfoundland at Marystown, which will keep men working there while the yards at Port Weller and Port Arthur are awaiting work and lying practically idle.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister assure us that the Minister of Finance will meet this year with representatives of the shipbuilding industry to accept their representations that the exemption from duty of large fishing vessels be lifted so that there will be work in the Atlantic yards on the construction of these boats and that the government work can be spread over other yards, including those in Ontario?

[Translation]

Hon. Michel Côté (Minister of Supply and Services): Mr. Speaker, this is another case of an Hon. Member who does not have his facts straight. He ought to know that when a ship like the *Simcoe* needs repairs costing over \$5 million, obviously bids are invited from the various shipyards in this country. That is what happened in the case of the *Simcoe*, and the best bid was approved. That is the way to help fight regional disparity, by providing for healthy competition. That is what this Government has been doing since 1984, Mr. Speaker, and that is how we have been able to create over 900,000 jobs in Canada.

FUTURE OF VICKERS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the same Minister who was talking about awarding contracts. This morning, 300 workers from Vickers in Montreal came to express their disapproval of the Conservative Government's failure to act in this respect. Could the Minister inform the House—after all, this is the third time these people are here! Could the Government, and the Minister who was already making plans with the previous Minister of Supply and Services to close down a shipyard in Quebec—could the Minister inform the House, in the presence of the workers' representatives who are here today, whether the Vickers yards will continue to exist? If so, is the Government prepared to immediately announce it is awarding them a contract so that 500 workers at the Vickers yards can go to work?

Hon. Michel Côté (Minister of Supply and Services): First of all, Mr. Speaker, if the Hon. Member wants to be frank, we shall be frank. In 1984, when we inherited a disastrous economic situation, especially in Canada's shipyards, this Government was certainly not responsible for that situation. Seventy-four Members from Quebec had neglected to defend the interests of Quebec's shipyards.

Mr. Speaker, consider initiatives like Bill C-22, which they have the nerve to turn down, and all in the interests of Quebec taxpayers, Mr. Speaker!

REQUEST THAT GOVERNMENT PROVIDE WORK FOR SHIPYARDS

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, this morning Vickers employees and their representatives booed the Minister and the Hon. Member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve for their inaction. Surely the Minister knows that a welder will never weld an aspirin. What they need is a ship contract, not pills. The Minister is the one who needs pills. What I and those people want to know is this: Seven ships are waiting to undergo repairs in 1988, so those people want to know why you wait until the year before the election to award patronage contracts? Why do you let them go hungry and force them to go on social welfare benefits, why not have these ships sent for immediate repairs in all Canadian shipyards so as to prevent these workers from going hungry?

Hon. Michel Côté (Minister of Supply and Services): First of all, Mr. Speaker, we did not wait for my colleague's representations before meeting with the workers. I met with them the first time they asked, at 11.30 this morning. I did not really need the intervention of my colleague.

Second, Mr. Speaker, when making reference to the Government's concern over the future of Canadian shipyards people should know—as my colleague does—that we are in a position to award various contracts from coast to coast precisely because our Government assumes its responsibilities. We will continue to defend the interests not only of Quebecers but of all Canadians as well.