

Government Orders

war, to wish them well as the Prime Minister of this country.

An hon. member: Shame.

Mr. MacDonald (Dartmouth): Do you know what he did? He made a decision and it says a lot about the Prime Minister. He made a decision that it was more important for that Prime Minister to meet with his Quebec caucus than it was to see the men and women off who were serving on those vessels and on the Sea King helicopters.

Ms. Clancy: Many of them from the province of Quebec.

Mr. MacDonald (Dartmouth): Many of them from the province of Quebec. He made a more important decision, to try to put out the fires that were raging uncontrolled in his Quebec caucus. He acted more as the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party than he did as the Prime Minister of this country. That is an insult that the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces and in the riding I represent and my colleague from Halifax represent for which he will never ever be forgiven.

The orders were given. What did the Prime Minister do? You wonder why people are cynical. Under great pressure from editorial boards, from Canadians from coast to coast, and from parliamentarians to recall Parliament, he waited. He waited until the final hour, a really courageous move. He waited until 10 days before he knew that this place had to resume sitting before he got the order-in-council from the Governor General and indicated that the troops would be put on operational alert in a potential theatre of war. That is the backdrop to the motion that we are debating today.

My colleagues and I in the Liberal Party support the Canadian Armed Forces. We have risen time and again in this House on this matter. We see this again today in the paper. At a time that the Canadian military has been told to stretch the resources to the limit because of the unprecedented crisis in the Persian Gulf, we read in the papers that one of the naval vessels that went over had to get a cannon installed on its deck that had to be taken out of a museum in Halifax.

We saw the ships go into a 10 or 12-day refit. They had to take armaments that were destined for the frigates being completed in Saint John and the frigate replacement program and put them on the decks of those vessels. They did that because this government loves to talk, especially around election time, about its commitment to the Canadian Armed Forces. Shortly after elections, we know where their commitments go. They are written in invisible ink when it comes to the Canadian Armed Forces. They cancelled Phase III of the Frigate Replacement Program. They carried out base closures from coast to coast in this country.

Just today, while we had those three vessels and the CF-18s in the Middle East, the Minister of National Defence is quoted in the paper as saying: "Hey, boys, be prepared, big cuts coming." If they cut them any more they will have to go on gas rations in the Persian Gulf to get those vessels home. That is a fact.

The people on this side of the House support the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces who are doing their best with outdated equipment under the threatened knife of further government cutting and under the incredible indifference of the Prime Minister. The men and women of the Canadian forces are still doing the best job they can with the resources that have been given to them.

We saw in Halifax and Dartmouth the 2,000 or so people who worked at the dockyards doing an absolutely incredible job. They refitted those three vessels in 10 days. It was incredible the job that they did in the short period of time that they were given to do it. It is those same individuals at the dockyard that this government refused in 1988 when they were negotiating a contract to give them wage parity with their counterparts on the west coast. It seems this government is intent on perpetuating wage discrimination based on where you live and not what job you do.

The Prime Minister in debate on this motion said that the employees of the dockyards in Halifax and Dartmouth should be commended for the fine job they did. I just hope that those words translate into a fair contract because their contract has come back up for negotiation. It is a contract that should, once and for all, get rid of regional rates of pay and an abhorrent bit of wage discrimination.