

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, answering on behalf of my colleague, I want to assure the member that the Government of Canada, certainly this government, has no knowledge of the kind of practices that have just been described.

With respect to the cancellation of the EH-101 contract, the Government of Canada is now negotiating a settlement with E.H. Industries Limited of London, England and the other EH-101 contractors. As the member knows, the company is owned equally by Agusta of Italy and Westland Helicopters of England. Our intention is to arrive at a fair and judicious settlement and to proceed as quickly and as reasonably as possible.

I would say this to the member with great respect for the importance of the question he asked: The onus is not on the government to assure the House that something improper has not happened; the onus is on the member, if he has some evidence, to produce it.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean H. Leroux (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, is it not the government's duty to shed light on this whole issue?

My question is for the Minister of National Defence. Given that the president of Agusta was arrested last week in Italy on charges of corruption, fraud and unethical practices in relation to several government contracts, how can the minister continue to refuse to investigate the circumstances surrounding the Canadian government's EH-101 contract with Agusta at a time when the government is about to pay millions of dollars for breaking its contract with the company?

[English]

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what the member is getting so excited about.

One of the very first actions of this government upon assuming office was to cancel the EH-101 helicopter contract. We are now performing the appropriate duty of concluding this whole arrangement in a responsible and appropriate way.

If the member is worried about people acting under undue influence, and he is raising the notion that someone is being cajoled into acting under undue influence, then he ought to be worried about a government that threatens people with a tax hike if they do not separate.

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SOMALIA INQUIRY

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, on April 24, Ruth Cardinal, the director general of public affairs for the Department of National Defence, addressed the Press Club of Canada.

She discussed the deployment of Canadian forces in Somalia and said: "In the airborne story Dr. Armstrong made some allegations. One of them was that two Somalis were shot in the back by Canadian soldiers. It seemed that his story did not have credence. This autopsy report done by an independent group proved Dr. Armstrong wrong".

My question for the Minister of National Defence is: How can the government tolerate such comments which not only contradict the minister's gag order of November 24 but also prejudice the inquiry?

Hon. David M. Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite correct in saying that in the House late last year, I publicly asked all members of the armed forces and of our department who had any information concerning the matters likely to be investigated by a potential commission to bring those matters forward to the commission once it was established.

If the utterances the hon. member quoted from are indeed accurate, and I have no direct knowledge today that they are although I am not saying they are not, then that individual will be reappraised of what I said before in the House. The individual will certainly be warned that any kind of comments made by anyone along those lines, especially someone in authority within our department, could be prejudicial. Those persons should go forward to the commission.

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, national defence is not only going out of its way to discredit the testimony of Dr. Armstrong, but it is actively removing him from any involvement with the commission's inquiry even though his November 1994 allegations compelled the minister to call an inquiry. Dr. Armstrong has conveniently been posted into the former Yugoslavia theatre, just in time for the inquiry to begin.

• (1125)

I heard the minister's answer the first time, but my question is: Why is DND attempting to remove Dr. Armstrong from the inquiry process in seeming contempt of the government's declared resolve to get to the bottom of the events in Somalia?

Hon. David M. Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I answered that question in the following way.

Dr. Armstrong is a member of the Canadian Armed Forces and has certain skills. People have to be posted from time to time. Dr. Armstrong and anyone else who has relevant information will be made available to the inquiry. I will give my hon. friend that assurance.

I do resent the member and his colleagues continually asserting that members of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence and the government in general do not wish to get to the bottom of all the sorry events that unfolded in Somalia. That is false. That is why we have set up and called for the creation of a commission with the most wide