

Privilege—Mr. Fulton

Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised at the Auditor General's findings. After all, what we were trying to do was to redress a decade of deliberate neglect of our forests.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Oberle: What we have done is we have increased by four times the federal commitment. Some regions of the country have not yet caught up with the backlog in our forest land. In my own province that is not the case. Some 250,000 hectares have been restocked there.

The question now is how quickly can we move to a more intensive forest management regime which involves not just the planting of trees but the farming of our forests. Our commitment is quite clear, something which has been demonstrated by the establishment of a full Department of Forestry.

GOVERNMENT POSITION—PROVISION OF INFORMATION

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I am shocked that the Minister is saying that he is not surprised. The question is this. What specific action is he prepared to take? I include in that information to Parliament, since there is no way that we can monitor this matter without having enhanced quality of information. As the Auditor General points out, information presented in Part III of the Estimates is inaccurate and at times confusing. Thus it is impossible for Members to monitor the expenditures adequately.

Will the Minister state what he intends to do about this specific issue?

Hon. Frank Oberle (Minister of State (Science and Technology) and Acting Minister of State (Forestry)): Mr. Speaker, we must be cognizant of the fact that the principal responsibility for keeping the inventory lies with the provinces. After all, it is a provincial resource.

The federal role in this area has in the past been exercised through research, as well as assistance, protection, maintenance, and enhancement of our forests. It is in that area that we will continue to play our role in co-ordination and co-operation with the provinces.

We are negotiating with the provinces about these matters to see how best we can develop a national inventory and how best we can redress some of the serious problems that have occurred as a result of this neglect in the past.

Mr. Speaker: That will be the last question of Question Period.

I have an application on privilege. The Chair recognizes the Hon. Member for Skeena.

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PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED DUMPING OF MUSTARD GAS

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I have consulted Beauchesne's, and I believe I have a question of privilege that meets the two tests, the first being a prima facie case and the second being the fact that I am raising the matter at the earliest opportunity.

The matter involves the dumping and location of 450 tonnes of mustard gas somewhere in the vicinity of Victoria and Esquimalt. On December 5, 1988, the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Beatty) wrote to a researcher who was at that time working for the Hon. Member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, and who has subsequently been doing some work for my office. In that letter the Minister of National Defence states:

Thank you for the letter of October 4, 1988 in which you inquired about the dumping of World War II shells containing nerve gas and mustard gas in the Pacific in 1947. There is no record of such an operation.

That letter is signed by the Minister of National Defence.

There is a very brief chronology which follows that. On December 8, 1988, CTV *National News* reported that National Defence dumped chemical weapons into the Pacific Ocean following the Second World War.

On December 9, 1988, Colonel Conrad Mialkowski, Assistant Director-General for Research and Development, National Defence, stated that the Canadian military never dumped artillery shells containing mustard gas into the Pacific Ocean. On that date I asked for a public inquiry into the matter because of the evidence that had been given by Canadian ex-servicemen regarding this matter. I point out that these were servicemen who were at Suffield when it was loaded, who were at Esquimalt when it was unloaded, and who saw it loaded onto a scow.

On December 13, 1988, the *Times-Colonist* of Victoria reported that by its own account of the 1947 dumping, it contradicted the statements made by the Canadian military spokesman and the Minister of