

edge, as a result of the crime investigation in Quebec, that large volumes of tainted meat have been sold, how can the minister by any stretch of the imagination feel that he has discharged his duties as Minister of National Health and Welfare?

[Translation]

Mr. Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, in this respect, I have no hesitation in answering yes to the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[English]

POSSIBILITY OF OBTAINING MEAT SAMPLES FROM ESTABLISHMENTS UNDER PROVINCIAL JURISDICTION—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. In view of the revelation by the minister that he first became acquainted with this situation in October 1973 as a result of rumours, may I ask whether at that time samples were taken from packing houses and abattoirs in the province of Quebec that were then operating outside the jurisdiction of the Minister of Agriculture and, if not, why not?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I am afraid the hon. member is once again distorting my previous statements in the House. I consistently said that in the fall of 1973 an inspector of my department started an investigation of the matter and later referred it to the police, but I never said that in October 1973, I personally was aware of the situation.

[English]

REASON FOR FAILURE TO PROSECUTE QUEBEC MERCHANTS SELLING MEAT UNFIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): The minister stated he was informed of this situation in October 1973. He told the committee this morning he did not contact the RCM Police until February, 1974. My first question is, why the delay? Second, why did the minister himself not proceed under the jurisdiction of the Food and Drugs Act and lay charges through the Attorney General for Canada?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Once again, Mr. Speaker, those are exactly the same questions as last week and which I answered several times. I repeat that I was not the one who asked for the intervention of the police. The reference was made in the normal and daily course of my department's operations by an inspector of my department in Montreal who started an investigation and asked for the intervention of the Mounted Police only in February because the investigation started in October had difficulty in getting under way, which shows how complex the matter is. Things are much less simple than the hon. member seems to think. There is nothing magical, nothing sinister either in all this in the sense that officials of my department co-operated normally with police authorities to bring the investigation to a

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successful end, which fortunately seems to be the present result.

[English]

REQUEST FOR STATEMENT BY MINISTER ON SALE OF MEAT UNFIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): In view of the substantial public unrest being created by virtue of the revelations being made in Quebec and the evidence that this tainted, contaminated, putrid, diseased meat has been sold outside the province of Quebec, in the interest of putting the minds of the public at rest, will the minister now follow the course he followed last fall when he was confronted with the situation of contaminated hamburger and make a statement in the House?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I have already replied very clearly to that question. A Royal Commission has been set up, the investigation must follow its course normally, and I do not think it would be proper at this time to make statements right and left, as apparently suggested by the hon. member, either to facilitate the investigation or reassure Canadian consumers.

[English]

AVAILABILITY OF REPORTS ON SAMPLES OF MEAT UNFIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION

Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Health and Welfare indicated that in February 1974 the RCMP were asked to investigate some evidence of tainted meat being sold. Can the minister tell us whether any samples were taken from the packing houses in Quebec at that time for examination to determine whether, indeed, this was meat from animals improperly slaughtered and, if so, are there reports available?

● (1420)

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is based again on erroneous information. As of February 1974, there was no evidence, only rumours, that such meat was being sold in Quebec. That is why police forces were called upon to carry out a full investigation, using all the means police forces have at their disposal and which my own department does not have.

[English]

REASON FOR FAILURE TO PROSECUTE QUEBEC MERCHANTS SELLING MEAT UNFIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION

Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca): A final supplementary. There now certainly appears to be evidence of tainted meat being sold on a massive scale. I do not think anyone questions this. I want to know why the minister is not laying charges and why he feels that, because an investigation is going on, charges cannot be laid.