

Oral Questions

Mr. Trudeau: But we have those rights federally now. They do not want to impose that on the provinces. It is hard to see what they are complaining about. They were proposing an amendment which, if passed by us, would go against the will of several provinces.

An hon. Member: It was accepted by your minister.

Mr. Trudeau: The hon. member mentioned the Premier of Saskatchewan. He might mention the Premier and government of Prince Edward Island. As he knows, the attorney general of Prince Edward Island was in this city lobbying against the clause on property rights.

Mr. Lawrence: You are getting senile.

Mr. Epp: All you wanted was—

Mr. Trudeau: I will make an offer—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Provencher is allowed one supplementary question, not a second one from his seat.

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HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES**TESTING OF CHEMICAL SPRAYS—POTENTIAL HEALTH HAZARDS**

Mr. Terry Sargeant (Selkirk-Interlake): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence. Over the past few months this House and the people of Canada have been patently misled about the amount and degree of chemical warfare testing in this country. First we had the 1953 tests in Winnipeg, then the tests off Vancouver Island in the mid-sixties, and now we have the Gagetown tests. Will the minister now come clean and tell us how many more tests like Gagetown occurred, when they occurred and how they occurred? Will he also tell us if there are any more tests like this going on today?

● (1430)

[Translation]

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Minister of National Defence): Madam Speaker, I think I already answered the question of the hon. member for Selkirk-Interlake yesterday when I told him that on the basis of our information, no further tests have been made to spray chemical products in the air, over bases or over public areas, and that I have given very strict instructions so that in future no project may be carried out without the minister's formal authorization.

[English]

Mr. Sargeant: Madam Speaker, if the minister had answered that question yesterday, I would not have asked it again today.

Yesterday the minister did admit to this House that he had known since last September of the existence of the Gagetown

report and tests. Given the seriousness of the potential health hazards, why did the minister cover this up at the time? Did he inform the Prime Minister and the minister of health so that the proper precautionary steps might be taken, and if not, why not?

Mr. Lamontagne: Madam Speaker, you have to put this incident in a proper and realistic perspective. These tests were done in 1966 and 1967. They were performed over a small area of a large base, namely, Gagetown, which comprises 250,000 acres. The tests were done on 400 acres. According to Mr. Hellyer, the minister at the time, they were strictly routine tests. I do not think the minister or even the Prime Minister should be advised of everything taking place on all of the bases across Canada. The product was commercially used. It is still commercially used, and we had no reason to think there would be any harm to the health of the people.

Mr. Sargeant: Madam Speaker, the minister has just admitted to this House that the tests were routine at the time. That would indicate to me that there is a possibility of considerably more tests and more hazards to the health of the Canadian military personnel involved. The minister also says there is no evidence as to the seriousness of the effects. How does the minister respond to the 2,000 Americans who are now suing Dow Chemical and the other manufacturers of Agent Orange? How does he respond to charges of proof that dioxin is one of the most deadly chemicals known to man? Has the minister sought any information from other sources, particularly the American government, as to how to deal with these potential health hazards caused by Agent Orange and other chemicals containing dioxin?

Mr. Lamontagne: Madam Speaker, I think the hon. member is making presumptions. I do not want to get involved in a legal argument with the United States government or the veterans' association of the United States. As I said before, I am ready, along with the minister of health for New Brunswick—the product is still being used in New Brunswick—and our own health minister, to collaborate fully in any kind of investigation into that product and how it could harm people.

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THE CONSTITUTION**PROPOSED RESOLUTION—INQUIRY RESPECTING SUPPORT FOR PROPERTY RIGHTS**

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Yesterday Canadian Press reported the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice as saying that the government was considering breaking its commitment to support the inclusion of property rights in the constitution because the continued support of the NDP was very important to the government. May I ask the Prime Minister whether the government has received the assurance from the NDP that as a result of breaking that