

Oral Questions

Mr. Epp (Provencher): One thing I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, and that is this—and I am not hiding behind anyone—what I can only do is act even on an allegation, on a fact. I cannot have the clairvoyance of being able to take an action on which I know nothing about.

VALIDITY OF PROCEDURES—MINISTER'S POSITION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Minister's answers, I regret to say, grow increasingly unconvincing.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: We were prepared yesterday to listen to the Minister who seems to be relying on scientific opinion for part of our concerns which he was addressing. But I want to ask him to reconsider what he has just said now. Dr. Todd, the expert in the field, who conducted the tests on Friday—all six have died in these particular tests he is referring to—said never before has there been a wait for such a period of time to take action in terms of warning after six mice died. He said:

... there had never been another case in which the department waited so long to issue an alert after all lab animals died.

He even went on to say pretty directly that maybe they should have taken action then, in retrospect, he said.

Clearly, this is his professional judgment. These are six specific tests. He is saying retrospectively that it is serious. He, retrospectively, ought to have acted. Since it is this professional's opinion that maybe they ought to have done something that could have headed off very serious harm, we hope no more than that for other Canadians, will the Minister now acknowledge that the procedures were wrong and he ought to accept responsibility for those procedures?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. gentleman is quoting from a newspaper article in the Toronto *Sun*. Let us go back to Dr. Todd's exact words of what he said yesterday. Let us keep this in mind because we are trying to get the full story out. I am not trying to hide any part of the story. On page 42 of the Steno Tran, of the information, Mr. Speaker, this is exactly what Dr. Todd says. He was being asked this question about warning the public, just as the Hon. Member has mentioned, and he says, and I will read in part because of the time.

In answer to your question, should there be a change or should, if mouse deaths occur in the future, I think we would have to look at that in the picture. I think if we had seen the same picture now, maybe we would have, but that is, you know ... In retrospect—

The Member says that should the procedures be changed. I said yesterday to him in his question I think it is a perfectly valid question. Obviously, we have to take a look again how can we improve procedures. But what I want him to understand and accept as well is that a Minister, standing in his or her place here, has to have some information in order to be able to exercise judgment. If I have none, then I cannot exercise judgment.

In terms of the process of whether the information should have gone more quickly, I think that is a valid question.

REQUEST FOR MINISTER'S RESIGNATION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Minister knows very well the traditions of ministerial responsibility for his Department.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: The Minister now has a senior scientific person who is acknowledging that given six deaths after six tests on a Friday that, in his judgment, he is clearly implying—there is no doubt about that, even from what the Minister has just read out—that they ought to have taken different steps, I say to the Minister, given the fact that one Canadian has died, many, many others are sick, why doesn't this Minister admit his Department was wrong? Why doesn't he accept responsibility for this serious error and submit his resignation? That is the tradition in this Parliament.

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, again the Member mentioned six tests. I think we have to be careful when he refers to six tests. The six mice that were used were from the same sample. Even the word "samples" has to be clearly understood in any testing. That is why, when we look at when Dr. Todd was doing those tests, he wanted to get samples not only that were on store shelves or in wholesalers bins, but from the mussel beds themselves. That was gone through yesterday as well.

So when the hon. gentleman says that there were six tests, he has to be very careful with the words and give the impression that there was a wide range of sample available and that six tests were done. That was not the case.

[Translation]

ACTUAL METHOD OF PROCEDURE—MINISTER'S POSITION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Minister has indicated that perhaps he will change the process. He said the same thing yesterday.

For the benefit of the House, would he clarify his intentions for the future and indicate whether—after this kind of tests, officials decide to stop shipments of such product—he intends to stop sales at the very same moment?

[English]

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, again I think that is a valid question, and I want to take the Member through this very carefully. Under the Food and Drug Act, the officials of the Department of National Health and Welfare have to be able to develop a scientific evidentiary line. That is what they were doing. In terms of taking additional action, and today I have taken again additional action, not on the basis of the Food and Drug Act, but on the basis as a Minister of Health that I am able under the Health and Welfare Act to warn Canadians of a possible