

Oral Questions

from the region, as well as the growing fears and frustrations of the 3,000 who have already left their homes, can the Minister tell us today the results of the tests conducted jointly with the Government of Quebec on the contamination in Saint-Basile-le-Grand?

Hon. Pierre H. Cadieux (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague knows, some results were made public on the weekend and I am not able today to give the results of the further tests now underway. For example, approximately 20 schools and a number of homes will be sampled today in the Saint-Basile-le-Grand area as well as in the region evacuated on the weekend. So, Mr. Speaker, we will of course be able to provide the results when they are known this week.

TREATMENT OF INFORMATION—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mrs. Lucie Pépin (Outremont): Mr. Speaker, the citizens of Saint-Basile-le-Grand deplore the lack of information and especially the lack of coordination in providing it. They have the impression that someone may be hiding the truth from them and that the information they receive varies depending on who is speaking.

So can the Minister tell us whether there would not be a way, in cooperation with the provincial Government, to find a spokesperson to coordinate all the information and provide as much information as possible, so that the citizens would be assured that the different levels of government are in control of the situation?

Hon. Pierre H. Cadieux (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I think that under the circumstances, it is clear that all levels of government involved have tried to control the situation and to reassure the Canadian people about what is going on in Saint-Basile-le-Grand and its aftermath. I think it would be appropriate, not to say desirable, not to do anything in this House to increase the public's fears, which are no doubt very justified.

Regarding coordination, Mr. Speaker, I am informed that Gilles Saint-Antoine, assistant director of the Quebec Police Force, has been designated commander of operations at the head of the new organizational structure set up on Saturday, and that Jean Demers of Environment Quebec is responsible for field operations.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, obviously, all federal authorities and the whole federal apparatus concerned are cooperating with the provincial authorities involved, so as to make this situation as livable as possible, under the circumstances.

DESTRUCTION OF TOXIC SUBSTANCES—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): My question is for the same Minister. As he knows, 3,000 residents from Saint-Basile-le-Grand and surrounding areas had to be evacuated

last week and 300 more during the weekend. Officials are running tests on the people, their houses and the farms in the area. Here is my question: Considering that the technology has been available since 1981, why has the Government not introduced legislation requiring that these substances be destroyed instead of simply being stored?

Hon. Pierre H. Cadieux (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, I think, it was mentioned in the House that a new technology had been developed by the National Research Council and, if I remember correctly, that information was made public in April 1988. This is certainly a revolutionary process; contrary to the present method, it does not involve burning PCBs; it calls for new facilities which will certainly be built, I hope, in the near future. It is clear that the Federal Government will cooperate in the implementation of this new technology in order to destroy PCBs safely and thus avoid similar situations to the one which occurred in Saint-Basile-le-Grand.

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE—REQUEST THAT GOVERNMENT INTRODUCE LEGISLATION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Minister refers to technology of the National Research Council. I was informed by a research scientist from AECL in Manitoba today that technology has existed since 1982, other than the technology to which the Minister refers. Mr. Colin Isaacs, President of Pollution Probe, also said on the weekend that such technology has existed for a number of years.

Since quite literally human lives are at stake here, I want to ask the Minister, notwithstanding the failure of past Governments, why the present Government does not build on what it has already done? Why does it not use the Criminal Code to make it mandatory that technology be applied for the destruction of PCBs after they have been used rather than allowing for their storage?

Hon. Pierre H. Cadieux (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the new technology and the Criminal Code, I think it is obvious that with the new Act passed by this Parliament in June of 1988, there are powers that will permit the Minister of the Environment to make sure that those disasters do not occur again, and if they do, which we certainly hope they do not, those involved will be punished to the full extent of the law. Obviously this Government will do everything in its power to ensure that PCBs are destroyed in a safe manner so that the safety and health of Canadians are not prejudiced.

GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Minister knows that in the existing law to which he has referred there is absolutely nothing making it mandatory that PCBs be destroyed. Once a storage facility has broken down,