

Oral Questions

NUMBER OF FEDERAL INSPECTORS

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Minister could provide us with some additional information concerning the frequency with which the federal Government exercises its responsibility for inspection. For example, the author of the article suggested that hazardous substances, including PCBs, are shipped in these tanker trucks because: "They are almost never tested by consumer or environmental officials".

It was confirmed to me this morning by officials in the Minister's Department who say that they do not have enough inspectors to live up to their mandate. Will the Minister confirm that there are not enough federal inspectors to do the job properly? Specifically, will he acknowledge that for all of Ontario and Québec there are only 32 active inspectors for these two very large provinces, which is many fewer than the provincial Governments themselves have in these fields? If this is true, will the Minister tell the House that he has every intention of increasing the number of inspectors soon so that an adequate job can be done?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to give the Leader of the New Democratic Party the assurance that for several weeks now, we have been conducting routine border inspections, together with the province of Ontario and the U.S. authorities, to ensure compliance with the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act.

Second, the Budget brought down last week gave my Department 56 person-years more to help implement the new Canadian legislation on the protection of environment, and intend to be increasingly vigilant.

Mr. Speaker, we also intend to get in touch with the oil industry to ensure that Canadians are offered high quality gasoline.

[*English*]

RESPONSIBILITY FOR HEALTH PROTECTION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, it was only within the last couple of hours that people in his own Department said that they do not have enough people to live up to the mandate. The Government takes credit for environmental action on both sides of the

border. When will it get its act together to protect the health of Canadians?

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

REQUEST FOR RCMP INQUIRY

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): My last question is directed to the Solicitor General. The United States, has one section of the FBI which specializes in investigating such activities. Does the RCMP have a similar operation here in Canada?

Hon. Pierre Blais (Solicitor General of Canada and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, I believe my colleague made it very clear that these are very serious allegations. I think we all agree on that. However, both my colleague and myself, and my other colleague who is responsible for Customs and Excise, intend to review all the allegations that were made this morning. We will check with other police forces that also have jurisdiction in this matter, and I personally asked the RCMP a few minutes ago, considering the seriousness of these allegations, to see what could be done tomorrow or even today, with this very serious information. However, I believe that before we launch a general investigation, we must be very careful about the matter of jurisdiction.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

INSPECTIONS OF PCBs—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Ms Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Speaking of being careful, Mr. Speaker, I suggest Canadian men and women would have expected the Government to show greater care because they are the ones who are likely to be affected by the PCBs.

Could I ask the Minister whether he is aware that such an increase of 56 person-years would translate into one person to cover every 100 kilometres of the Canada-United States border and whether he feels it is enough to keep a close watch on this matter?

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the proper authorities have identified the points where these materials are shipped across the border and we carry out regular inspections to make sure that the law is respected. We have 56 additional persons. We will check to see whether we have enough. I would