

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

[Translation]

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**CONTAMINATION BY PCBs—MEASURES GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO TAKE**

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of the Environment.

This morning we heard that according to a report by the Quebec Department of the Environment, contamination by PCBs affects nearly all Quebecers. This includes infants who are breast-fed, people who eat fish, factory workers and so on down the list. All Quebec families are affected by this situation. My question is therefore as follows: Could the Minister inform the House and the men and women of Quebec about what she intends to do to deal with a situation that is worrisome, to say the least?

Hon. Suzanne Blais-Grenier (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition for his question. It is a situation that concerns us all and it is clear that we must take immediate action. That is why I have called a federal-provincial conference on how to dispose of the PCB wastes lying around the country.

The Quebec study was based on U.S. studies and reveals something we have known for a number of years, namely that if we were to make an exhaustive study of all human beings alive today, we would find that their fatty tissues contain traces of PCBs. The situation is therefore very urgent.

CONTAMINATION BY PCBs

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): I have a supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

Now the Minister is saying the situation is very urgent, but this conference is being called very late in the day.

The Minister does not seem to be concerned about the gravity of the situation, any more than she was yesterday when she said that PCBs did not cause cancer.

Does the Minister feel that the situation is peculiar to Quebec or is it more widespread? Does it concern all Canadian men and women and is this not a national issue rather than an exclusively provincial responsibility, as she said before?

Hon. Suzanne Blais-Grenier (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I think that the presence of PCBs in the fatty tissues of the human body concerns the entire planet and obviously concerns all Canadians, and that is why we have called an emergency federal-provincial conference for the end of May, something the Liberal Party never did during the fifteen years it was in power.

[English]

DEPARTMENT'S RESEARCH INITIATIVE

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, it is the opinion of those of us on this side of the House that such a conference should have been called right after the first PCB spill.

The Minister's position is full of holes. The World Health Organization believes that PCBs should be treated as cancer causing agents, but the Minister does not. Her Department believes that the situation in Lake Ontario is serious, but she does not.

If the Minister really believes that we need more research into PCBs, why did she cut the research initiative in her own Department on these particular chemicals? How would she explain that to the people of Quebec who are now concerned about it? How would she explain it to the people who drink water from Lake Ontario, and particularly to people in northern Ontario who were faced with that recent PCB spill?

[Translation]

Hon. Suzanne Blais-Grenier (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I think the Leader of the Opposition has been misinformed by his environment critic. If his facts had been correct, he would know that we did not cut off research on toxic substances such as PCBs. In fact, we have taken over the research on the state of scientific literature on the effects of PCBs which had been done at the National Research Council. The study is being put together in my department and will be published this summer.

[English]

REQUEST FOR RESTORATION OF FUNDING

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Minister of the Environment. She never ceases to astonish us on this side of the House by the speed with which she reverses herself—from her lack of sensitivity yesterday in committee in answering questions on PCBs to her full endorsement this morning of the importance of PCBs to human health.

● (1120)

Let me ask the Minister once and for all whether she will admit her mistake in allowing such substantial cuts in Environment last November, and whether she will re-establish the funds she cut in Environment Canada for the protection of the long-term health of Canadians.

[Translation]

Hon. Suzanne Blais-Grenier (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, ever since I became a Member of this House, the hon. environment critic for the Liberal Party has been constantly referring to my lack of sensitivity. Is this supposed to make up for his lack of effectiveness during the nine months he was himself Minister of the Environment?