

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES

WINNIPEG—STORAGE OF PCBs IN RAILWAY BOXCAR

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Acting Minister of the Environment, or the Deputy Prime Minister, whichever is answering for that portfolio.

In the last four or five days Canadians have been reminded how increasingly dangerous this industrial world of ours has become, and how absolutely crucial it is for Governments to take on the question of public safety with the utmost vigilance. Unfortunately, it has not been an isolated incident.

In my own province of Manitoba it was discovered late last week that on federal Crown land under the jurisdiction of the federal Government, in the CPR marshalling yards a boxcar containing PCBs was left totally unattended and unsecured, with a seal on it that a nine-year old boy with a penknife could have broken into without any apprehension. Inspections had not taken place for a long period of time, and environment officials at both levels of government professed to be surprised at the results.

Considering how serious a problem this is in the federal jurisdiction, can the Minister tell us how many other boxcars are sitting in railway yards across the country unattended and unsecured? Does the Government have a plan to deal with the problem of the serious contamination and vulnerability that exists on Crown land and railway properties across Canada?

Hon. Pierre H. Cadieux (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, with respect to this very important situation, I think that we should all check our facts before we make allegations.

I am informed that there is a railcar owned by Canadian Pacific Railway in Winnipeg, that the car is in an isolated area, and located on a track that is fenced and patrolled regularly. The car has been inspected and is secure, with no leakages.

REQUEST FOR REGULATIONS

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, what the Minister does not say is that the inspection took place after the boxcar was discovered. In the very same railway yard a fire broke out on Saturday night within proximity of the same boxcar. If the Minister thinks that that is adequate safety coverage, there is no wonder the Government and the country are in the trouble they are, and Canadians expect an awful lot more.

In 1985 both levels of government, provincial and federal, came to a meeting and agreed on a series of steps that would be taken, none of which have since been taken. There are no destruction facilities, and there are no regulations. There are only guidelines that cannot be enforced.

Oral Questions

When is the federal Government going to take on its full responsibility and introduce the type of action and initiative that are required to provide proper regulations to guard against the type of event that we saw in Winnipeg this weekend?

• (1430)

Hon. Pierre H. Cadieux (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, again the Opposition tends to make statements of fact that are unfounded. Since 1977 the use of PCBs has been restricted through regulations under the Environmental Contaminants Act. Since June 30, 1988, all those regulations have been incorporated under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act that was tabled and passed by this Government. Nothing had been done by the previous Government.

TECHNOLOGY TO NEUTRALIZE PCBs

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, the Minister is guilty of a clear abdication of responsibility and response. There are no regulations in place governing these kinds of events.

I would like to ask the corollary question. Officials of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited and the National Research Council have said that they have developed technologies that make it possible to neutralize PCBs, but to quote a federal official of AECL, there has not been the political will to pursue those kinds of treatments. Does the Government have any intention of bringing in a plan of action with the kind of resources and investments that would bring about destruction facilities to deal with PCBs so that we do not have the kinds of circumstances that occurred in Québec and in Manitoba over the past week?

Hon. Pierre H. Cadieux (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I am particularly surprised that that Hon. Member is talking about abdication. As I have already indicated, we have an Act in force that was passed in June of 1988. Regulations are included, and we will make sure that incidents like the one in Saint-Basile-le-Grand do not occur again, with or without the help of the Opposition.

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[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

ECOLOGICAL ACCIDENT AT SAINT-BASILE-LE-GRAND—REQUEST FOR RESULTS OF TESTS

Mrs. Lucie Pépin (Outremont): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. Since last week, the Minister of the Environment has been assuring us that the federal Government, in cooperation with the Government of Quebec, is providing all possible assistance in taking samples to determine the degree of contamination in Saint-Basile-le-Grand. Given the further evacuation of another 300 people