

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

HEALTH

GOVERNMENT ACTION TO ASSURE MEAT UNFIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION NOT SOLD BY QUEBEC MERCHANTS

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is for that not so artful dodger, the Minister of National Health and Welfare, about his responsibilities under the Food and Drugs Act, a federal statute which makes no reference to provincial inspectors or even to federal inspectors, but which requires the Minister of National Health and Welfare to ensure that food not fit for human consumption is not peddled to Canadians. Since the minister freely admitted yesterday that his department was aware of the problems with regard to meat inspection in the province of Quebec at least two years ago, I ask the minister pointedly not what he has done in terms of discussions, but what he has done to draw this problem to the attention of the government of the province of Quebec and to the attention of his colleague, the Minister of Agriculture, so that these very evident shortcomings in the meat inspection system in that province could be corrected?

● (1110)

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): As I have already indicated, as soon as rumours started going round some two years ago, the inspectors of my department started to look into them in order to check whether there was any truth to them; upon finding concrete evidence that there was, they immediately asked the appropriate police force to make the necessary inquiry. The Quebec government was advised of the matter at that time, since the Quebec police force as well as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were involved in the police inquiry of which we see the results today.

[English]

GOVERNMENT ACTION IN PROVINCES OTHER THAN QUEBEC TO ASSURE MEAT UNFIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION NOT SOLD

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): I will ask the minister another question with respect to his responsibilities under this act. What action has he taken with regard to canvassing the situation in other provinces? Having been well aware of the situation in the province of Quebec, what action has he taken with respect to other provinces to ensure that the kind of laxity and confusion which has been indicated in Quebec does not exist elsewhere in Canada?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): As I have just indicated, with regard to the situation in Quebec, none of the packing plants implicated are inspected by the federal Department of Agriculture. At the present time, there are no indications that packing plants in other provinces under the jurisdiction of the federal government are involved in practices similar to

[Mr. Wagner.]

those discovered in Quebec. However, should any come to light, my officials will look into the matter immediately and take whatever steps are necessary. Still, I must remind the Leader of the Opposition that a number of those packing plants are inspected by representatives of the federal Department of Agriculture. Other are inspected by provincial inspectors; in still other cases, some provinces have delegated to federal inspectors of the Department of Agriculture the responsibility of checking operations of packing plants, within their respective jurisdictions.

[English]

Mr. Stanfield: Now that we are aware of the shocking situation in the province of Quebec, I will give the minister one further chance to tell this House whether he has conducted any survey with regard to the quality of inspection in the other provinces and whether he has done anything at all—not to pass off excuses or red herrings about federal inspection—to discharge his responsibility. Is he in a position to tell this House that meat is in fact being adequately inspected in the other provinces today?

[Translation]

Mr. Lalonde: I have already answered that question, Mr. Speaker, when the hon. Leader of the Opposition put his first one.

[English]

GOVERNMENT ACTION TO PROTECT QUEBEC CONSUMERS FROM MEAT UNFIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, in view of the statement made yesterday by the Quebec minister of agriculture that the Minister of National Health and Welfare was shirking his responsibility and not discharging his statutory responsibilities to the people of Quebec, what is the minister now doing in light of the daily revelations in Quebec, the latest of which indicated that prepared meats are made from contaminated or diseased beef? What is the minister doing now to put at ease the minds of consumers in the province of Quebec that meat has been properly inspected to protect them?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I still believe that the best proof that steps have been taken is the investigation going on right now in Montreal. And, as the hon. member knows, the packing plants concerned have had their permit withdrawn by the Quebec government. As for the statement of the Quebec minister of agriculture, I am not aware of it. I shall look into what he may have said but it has nothing to do with the facts which everybody can check. Institutions being investigated at the present time fall under the Quebec government's jurisdiction.

[English]

Mr. McGrath: A supplementary question. The inquiry taking place in Quebec is a provincial inquiry. The minister cannot come to the House and tell us that he has no jurisdiction because clearly under the Food and Drugs Act he has complete jurisdiction over all packing houses. I ask the minister, in discharging that responsibility, if he will do as much now as he did last fall when Canadians were