

Oral Questions

REQUEST FOR MINISTER'S RESIGNATION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. It concerns the following irrefutable facts: that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has approved about a million cans of tuna which two sets of federal inspectors, plus a panel from four Canadian provinces, deemed to be unfit for human consumption. This means, among other things, that it could cause senior citizens or children to throw up, as well as other people. That is all medical fact.

Is the Prime Minister prepared to accept the judgment of the Minister, which was that he was prepared to give the benefit of the doubt to the industry in such circumstances, that is to say, the Minister was prepared to gamble with the health of Canadians? Or will the Prime Minister do the proper thing and make clear that such a Minister is not entitled to remain in the Canadian Cabinet?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans never said that he would propose to give the benefit of the doubt and gamble against the health and safety of Canadians. This Government always resolves any doubt in favour of Canadians; that has been its record.

In response to the thoughtful question of my hon. friend, as I understand it, what we have so far is no objective evidence whatsoever of any threat to health and safety, which are very important matters. I think my hon. friend would agree that since that time, since the incident occurred, regulations have been changed in such a manner as to preclude the possibility of this kind of incident ever occurring again and, no less important, that in this area Canada has a superb reputation for quality. I hope that no Member of the House would inadvertently make a partisan or unfair comment which would diminish it.

REQUEST THAT PRODUCT BE WITHDRAWN FROM STORES

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said that his Government will always do what is in the interests of Canadians. As is always the case with the Prime Minister, which Canadians are we talking about? That is the issue.

The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is prepared to let this product remain out there on the shelves, almost a million cans, for Canadians to consume. Incredibly enough, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs is reported to have said this morning that he agrees, thus giving up his obligation to the consumers of Canada. Will the Prime Minister make it clear that he wants an industry which is important to this country to continue with its international reputation, and that he wants Canadians to have healthy food by having that product withdrawn from shelves all across Canada and taking corrective steps to ensure that this does not happen again?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think my first obligation was to ensure that there was no

evidence whatsoever of any threat to health or safety. That appears very much to be the case. My hon. friend asks about what would happen, notwithstanding that fact, if the product is less than desirable. If that is the case, it will be removed because the health of Canadians will be protected at all times and in all circumstances, and the quality of our products will be so recognized internationally.

● (1430)

INSPECTORS' FINDINGS

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): My question pertains to the last comment of the Prime Minister. Considering the fact that not one but two groups of federal inspectors have said that it is unfit for human consumption, that it can make people vomit, and that this judgment has been agreed to by a panel representing four provinces in addition to the Province of New Brunswick, is this not enough evidence for the Prime Minister to make him reach the right conclusion now, to stop those cans from being purchased even this afternoon in stores across Canada and have them taken off the shelves?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): I think I have responded fully to my hon. friend. The first obligation was to go to the core issue which was the issue of any possible threat to health and safety. I think that matter has been resolved. The benefit of any doubt, of course, is resolved in favour of Canadian consumers and our reputation internationally. We will take every action consistent with those objectives, I assure my hon. friend.

MINISTER'S RESIGNATION SOUGHT

Mr. George Baker (Gander-Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries has placed a new meaning on the term "tuna fish surprise". It is not a very pleasant surprise to open a tin of rancid tuna.

My question is directed to the Prime Minister who removed from his first potluck Cabinet the Minister of the Environment because she endangered Canadian animal lives. I am asking the Prime Minister will he ask for the resignation of the Minister of Fisheries whose actions are threatening the well-being of Canadian human lives?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, within the last little while there have been some liberties taken with allegations of fact that affect reputations. They will be dealt with at a parliamentary commission and will be looked at very carefully. Some of the allegations that have been made deserve a response before an objective forum.

I think there is one thing that I can say that would be widely acclaimed by all Members of this House and that is that the Minister of Fisheries who has served in this House honourably and well, has served as Minister in two Governments—

Mr. Marchi: Play it again, Sam.