

Oral Questions

No, there were no samples to test.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister explain why the Minister of National Health and Welfare misled the people of Canada and Parliament on this issue?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I would be glad to answer the question of the right hon. gentleman. I have not misled the House and I have given all the information available to me. The time in question is the Saturday and Sunday. I think that is what the right hon. gentleman referred to. I have all the transcripts here as well.

May I refer him to the two parts of any investigation. First is the lab work, which was discussed, for example, with Dr. Elliott yesterday, as well as Dr. Liston, Dr. Law and Dr. Todd. On the other side is the epidemiological work or the investigative work. And I have got all those details here as well. As to what happened on Saturday and Sunday—I do not know, Mr. Speaker, if you give me the time—but maybe I can do it very quickly.

• (1120)

Mr. Gauthier: Do it on motions.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Take it before a parliamentary committee or something.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, then there will be other questions obviously. Let me just say to the right hon. gentleman, I have information here on the epidemiological work, both on the Saturday and the Sunday.

[Translation]

REQUEST FOR EXPLANATION OF ALLEGED CONTRADICTION

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, no laboratory tests were done on the weekend. The laboratory mice in Blacks Harbour, New Brunswick, were all dead at three o'clock Friday afternoon. That is what we heard yesterday. Those in Ottawa were all dead at four o'clock the same day. The Minister of National Health and Welfare said Wednesday this week in the House that a small number of mice had died. The problem was not a serious one. However, employees in his Department admitted that all the mice that had been injected with the deadly toxin at the Ottawa laboratory had died Friday. Could the Minister explain this obvious contradiction? Could he explain the Minister's incredible misrepresentation of the facts?

[English]

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, yes, I can explain that as well and I have read Dr. Todd's testimony of yesterday, and for instance where he said the six mice out of six mice had died, and I will get into that in this way. We have one sample of mussels and obviously if those from the same sample is injected into mice, in terms of the death of those mice, that is what Dr. Todd referred to. What the right hon. gentleman is tying together is that that was the only test, or that was the only reference that I made. I

had some more studies done today in terms of how many mice in fact had been tested, because I think that is a legitimate piece of information to put into the picture as well. And we have tested as of this morning 336 mice from Prince Edward Island and the Magdalens. Of those 336 mice, 93 have died.

Now, what I am trying to convey to the right hon. gentleman is that we have to do the lab work as well as the field work, if I can characterize it that way. And I say to him that I, as a Minister, have a responsibility to act on the information that I get from my scientists. And his member today again in public debate, or public TV, said that I had known prior to the weekend. Again, I repeat, and I do not know how many times I have done that, that is simply not true.

EXERCISE OF MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the more we get into this matter the less able is the Minister to substantiate his statements by the statements of his own officials.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): I suggest that this matter be brought before a parliamentary or judicial inquiry in order that we can get at the facts.

Mice were injected with deadly toxin in Blacks Harbour, New Brunswick, and died at three o'clock on the Friday. Mice injected with the same deadly toxin died the same Friday at 4 p.m. in Ottawa. The alarm bells went off and no one was listening.

Why was the Minister not informed? Why were the labs closed for the weekend? Why was the stop order on the shipment only made on Sunday? Why did the Minister only inform the Canadian people on Tuesday? Why was he not informed before Monday?

Why will he not take responsibility, as a Minister, for his own negligence and, in particular, for the negligence of his departmental officials? That is what ministerial responsibility is all about. Will the Minister come clean and give all of the facts to the people of Canada and to Parliament?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I have come clean and I am coming clean this morning again. On the Saturday, the 28th, we got samples, one from St. Peters, seven additional from the Atlantic. We looked at the destinations. We looked at the routing.

At the fish lab in Prince Edward Island the lab was preparing extracts. Those extracts were sent to Ottawa to Dr. Todd by Canadian International. They were picked up on Sunday. We identified the leases. We identified the maps. On Sunday we interviewed a person by the name of Wayne in Charlottetown from our Department, went and interviewed illness complaints on three people. We then looked at the fisheries, at the bills of lading, the shipping records. It was on that basis