

*Oral Questions*

but from all Canadians as they are a direct denial of the democratic action of the population.

\* \* \*

**HEALTH****TOXIC MUSSELS AFFAIR—QUERY WHY MINISTER DID NOT INFORM PUBLIC PROMPTLY**

**Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare and concerns the problem with mussels.

On November 28, the rats died. The Minister was informed on November 29 and stopped deliveries. Consumers were informed only on December 2.

Since the Minister had the information required to stop deliveries, why did he not warn the consumers at the same time?

• (1450)

[English]

**Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member's statement had details in it which were not accurate. We received samples from Prince Edward Island at 8.15 p.m. on Saturday, November 28. At 10 a.m. on Sunday, November 29, based on very preliminary reports a decision was made by the Bureau of Field Operations HPB in Ottawa to stop distribution of any further product from P.E.I. At 10.15 a.m., 15 minutes later, HPB discussed the decision with BFO officials by phone. At 10.30 a.m., 15 minutes later, we notified the HPB, Atlantic region.

I was not informed about the "reason to believe" and the "stop shipment" on the Sunday. I was informed of the problem on the Monday. I told the Department to get me every detail and "we are going to put out a health alert at the first moment we receive any scientific medical information". The minute I received that on Tuesday the health alert went forward.

**TIME BETWEEN STOPPING SHIPMENTS AND INFORMING PUBLIC**

**Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt):** Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely serious situation.

**Mr. Crosbie:** We know that!

**Mr. Rodriguez:** After all, no one got sick or was hospitalized over tuna, but they are certainly getting sick and being hospitalized on this mussel deal.

Since the Minister had "reason to believe", and on that basis he stopped the shipments, then the "reason to believe" should also be exercised in favour of consumers. My point is, why was there a lapse between stopping the shipments and informing the public that they ought not to be purchasing this stuff?

**Mr. Gauthier:** Same question.

**Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, now that the Hon. Member has accepted the facts I gave him, let us go to the Monday and Tuesday, November 30 and December 1. On the Monday we injected into mice and rats the material which could have a toxin in it. On the basis of our past experience, the size of the animals, and the amount of neurological and other damage observed, decisions can be taken. The Hon. Member must realize that the medical detective work takes some time. That was the time that was used on Monday and Tuesday.

**TESTING OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND MUSSELS**

**Mr. George Henderson (Egmont):** Mr. Speaker, I have a short supplementary question for the Minister. Is he telling the House that no tests on those mussels were made on Friday, November 27, by Dr. Todd? Is he trying to tell us that no tests were made and no mice died on that day?

**Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** No, Mr. Speaker, that is not what I said. What I say to the hon. gentleman is that even at this moment the exact source of toxin in the Prince Edward Island mussels has not been determined scientifically or medically. We are not dealing with a traditional toxin. It could have been from dredging. It could have been from algae bloom. The toxin secreted by the mussel is to ward off any bacterial activity in the mussel. It is that toxin which is damaging to human beings. Let us keep the details very straight.

**MINISTER'S KNOWLEDGE OF EVENTS**

**Mr. George Henderson (Egmont):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the Minister knows that mice died on November 27. That has been established. Does he not think that the serum from the mussels which was injected into these mice and killed them would be a health hazard to humans? He knew that on Friday night.

**Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, I know the Hon. Member is someone who likes to stay with the details. No, that is not true. I go back to exactly when this Minister knew. This Minister knew there was a problem with mussels on the Monday.

**Ms. Copps:** He was not in control of his Department.

**Mr. McKnight:** Get control of your mouth, Copps.

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** During the week tests were being done by the Department. The Hon. Member knows various tests are done on various foods by the Department on a routine basis. I am not informed of every one of those tests. I was informed on the Monday.