

Oral Questions

● (1435)

Is the Prime Minister telling Canadians to do as I say and not as I do?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everybody knows in Canada that to be a member of Parliament is a very unusual occupation. We do not come to Parliament to be here for 50 years. That is very rare. There are only two of us who have been here pretty long: the Solicitor General and myself. The average stay in the House is less than six years. That is a reality people understand.

We have said to the Canadian people very clearly in the red book what we were to do. We went even further than that and we campaigned on that.

I understand members of the Reform Party tried to present a budget last week and it was a complete flop because they were not competent enough to prepare a competent budget. Being so incompetent they know their value is not very good and they do not want to be overcompensated.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we hear a lot of rhetoric from the competent members opposite about fairness and equity.

Will the Prime Minister explain to Canadians why there is one standard of fairness for Liberal members of Parliament and another for the rest of Canadians?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think members of Parliament who were elected previously have acquired some rights. There is a rule in democracy that we do not pass retroactive legislation. When people have acquired some rights we respect the rights that have been acquired.

I know that members of the Reform Party are desperate. Since they have no policy except the same rhetoric all the time, they now choose to go for the cheap shot. You know the people who have no generosity, but the Canadian people understand that we have good members of Parliament who work very hard, are underpaid and deserve every penny we are paying for them as taxpayers of Canada.

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[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 21, the Quebec court of appeal declared the federal regulations on PCBs unconstitutional. This decision puts an abrupt end to double regulation of PCBs and leaves the field open for Quebec, whose standards are much stricter than Ottawa's.

Does the minister agree that this recognition by the courts of provincial jurisdiction in the area of toxic products invalidates a

significant part of federal environmental legislation on the control of toxic products?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is true that the court of appeal dismissed the interim order issued by the Minister of the Environment, the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

The court decided that the interim order he issued following the incident in Saint-Basile-le-Grand was improper. The court decided not to rule on specific sections of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. The interim order issued by the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean was declared unconstitutional.

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, even though the decision ends double regulation of toxic products, will the minister confirm the statement by her parliamentary secretary for the environment that the federal government will study the possibility of appealing this decision to the Supreme Court?

[English]

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to clarify, the Court of Appeal ruled that the interim order put in place by the then Minister of the Environment, the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean, was unconstitutional.

It ruled on the PCB interim order that has subsequently been replaced by chlorobiphenyl regulations. It specifically did not rule on the constitutionality of the application of CEPA. It protected the integrity of CEPA.

● (1440)

I think the majority of Canadians would support the notion that the federal government has a very specific role to play in the cross-border transportation of toxic materials. It did, however, rule that the interim order put in place by the then Minister of the Environment was unconstitutional.

Mr. Guy H. Arseneault (Restigouche—Chaleur, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, global warming is a problem that threatens the survival of the earth—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Restigouche—Chaleur has the floor.

Mr. Arseneault: I guess I have a fan club in the Reform Party. They may not take global warming seriously but we do on this side of the House. We know that it threatens the environment and that inefficient use of energy is a contributing factor.

Could the Minister of Natural Resources inform the House about the federal buildings initiative and what it is doing to reduce expenditures and at the same time get our house in order environmentally?