

Mr. Speaker, at this point, I think a few words are in order about the role played by the Opposition, especially by the Member for Danverport (Mr. Caccia) and by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) in this matter, and I would qualify their conduct as shameful. All last week, Mr. Speaker, we have heard a series of charges directed at me and my department, on the action that we should have taken and the action we omitted to take, all of this proffered in the vociferous style adopted by the Opposition since the beginning of the new session, a style that the Hon. Member for Davenport wields so well. These charges, Mr. Speaker, are all preposterous and absurd, even allowing for the fact that the Opposition is trying to score political points. In fact they need to score a couple of points if we look at the polls. In this House we have become accustomed to the kind of absurdities that are being spread around and that are merely fodder for the sensationalist type of press and are not an attempt to inform the public objectively about situations on which it must form an opinion. However, this vociferous style and these erroneous allegations have not had the desired effect on Canadians since September 4.

Mr. Speaker, when the Members of the Opposition, including their party leader, the Leader of the Opposition in the House, play on the sentiments of the Canadian public in order to score political points, and I said it before and I say it again, their conduct is absolutely shameful. Let me give you an example of their behaviour. The Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition directed the following question to the Prime Minister on April 16 of this year, and I quote:

[English]

Will the Prime Minister consult with the Minister of the Environment to ask her to come before this House and admit that under the Environmental Contaminants Act, a federal Act, she has a primary responsibility, not diluted by provincial jurisdiction, for the prevention and cleanup of spills of dangerous chemicals?

• (1140)

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, is it possible that the Right Hon. Member, the Leader of the Liberal Party and the Leader of the Liberal Opposition in the House, who is himself a member of the legal profession, is it possible that he does not know or understand the scope of the legislation to which he is referring and put his foot in it, all in good faith of course? Can he possibly have acted this way in good faith? Is it possible that a professional lawyer whose own Party was in office when that legislation was adopted—I am referring to the Environmental Contaminants Act—is it possible that a lawyer and Party leader does not know the application and scope of the law? Mr. Speaker, the Right Hon. the Leader of the Opposition refers to the Environmental Contaminants Act and rakes us over the coals for failing to intervene in Kenora pursuant to that Act. Is it possible that the Leader of the Opposition is so badly informed or advised by his environment critic, the Hon. Member for Davenport, that he does not realize that in this specific case,

*Supply*

the Kenora incident, that Act does not apply? Mr. Speaker, I leave you to draw your own conclusions on the ignorance—obviously crass ignorance in this case—or malicious intent of the Opposition. Mr. Speaker, that is reprehensible behaviour whereby the people are held to ransom instead of being given the information they need to make their own objective judgement on the events in Kenora.

So as to enlighten the Right Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, I will give him a summary of the purpose of the Environmental Contaminants Act to which he erroneously referred in this House on several occasions last week. According to the Act, no person shall, in the course of a commercial, manufacturing or processing activity, wilfully release, or permit the release of a substance specified in the schedule or any substance that is a member of a class of substances specified in the schedule. It does not cover an incident like that in Kenora. It does not cover the use of dangerous substances in business and industry. Therefore, the Act to which the Right Hon. the Leader of the Opposition referred many times does not apply in this case. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the Leader of the Opposition and his environment critic go back to the basics for further study and better understanding of the scope of the various pieces of legislation now in force in Canada.

The Act which might have applied in this situation is the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act. Unfortunately, this Act could have been made operative under the former Liberal Government, but it has been lying on the shelf for five years and, owing to the inaction of the former Minister of Environment, the Hon. Member for Davenport, nothing has been done, as the NDP spokesman said earlier. Five years went by without the Liberal Government doing anything to make the Act operative. Having strongly criticized the use of PCBs in 1980, the former Government did not see any point in legislating on their transportation, storage and disposal. Of course, constant bickering between the former administration and the provinces made it impossible to reach the federal-provincial agreement required in this respect. It was the Conservative Government that had to tackle the issue shortly after taking office. It was the Conservative Government that took the initiative of amending the Act in the early days of its mandate and make it operative. Thanks to the intervention of my colleague the Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski), Canada's Parliament now has the tools required to control transportation of dangerous substances and to draft the relevant regulations which will be in force as of next July 1. Following the Kenora incident and in view of the urgency of the situation, however, the Hon. Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) availed himself of a specific provision of the Act to implement the regulations on April 19, thereby hastening the coming into force of the legislation scheduled for next July 1. That is the attitude which the opposition is trying to describe as inertia. Well, Mr. Speaker, I suggest Canadians