

Oral Questions

Last Friday the Prime Minister called to congratulate Ben. Then on Monday the Minister for Fitness and Amateur Sport, supported by the Prime Minister, condemned Ben to a lifetime suspension. On Tuesday the former Minister of Fitness and Amateur Sport suggested that Ben Johnson, in his belief, is innocent and that Canada should fight to defend his honour. Then on Wednesday the Prime Minister reversed himself and ordered a full inquiry under the leadership of the Deputy Prime Minister to grant Mr. Johnson an opportunity to clear his name.

How can the Acting Prime Minister justify and explain the contradictory actions of the Government in the face of the Ben Johnson story? More important, will she now do the honourable and correct thing and suspend the lifetime suspension until this inquiry, under full process, has been given a chance to look into this matter, conduct hearings and make the appropriate recommendations? Does the Government not think that this would be the fair and judicious process with which to proceed in this very crucial matter?

Hon. Jean J. Charest (Minister of State (Youth)) and Minister of State (Fitness and Amateur Sport): Mr. Speaker, I think every Canadian sympathizes with the situation of Ben Johnson, certainly for being an athlete and a person who represented us well and who is now in some difficulty. We can sympathize with him.

I have no problem sharing in that sympathy. But what I have a great deal of difficulty with is the position of the Liberal Party that would apply sanctions to all athletes in Canada, according to the rules and policies we have had up until now, but in the case of one athlete, in particular, for political reasons would take a different position. I think it is dishonest. It is inconsistent. It is not compatible with the truth and our approach as a Government, but it is typical of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Mr. Marchi: Mr. Speaker, what I have difficulty with is being a Canadian and being embarrassed and appalled in watching the Prime Minister shift gears and shift positions on this one issue of a champion, a Canadian citizen, in front of the international community, depending on where he thinks public opinion is going to be. That is what I have difficulty with.

CONDUCT OF PROPOSED INQUIRY

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): I return to the Acting Prime Minister. Given the fact that the Prime Minister has asked the Deputy Prime Minister to head this inquiry rather than the current Minister of Fitness and Amateur Sport, and given that that obviously signals a loss of confidence, why does the Minister and the Government, rather than simply shifting another important dossier on to the Deputy Prime Minister, not replace the existing Minister of Fitness and Amateur Sport with an individual who enjoys the confidence of the Government and Canadians?

Will the Government assure this House that that inquiry will be fully public, because it has not committed itself to that? And will it commence immediately following the completion of the Olympic Games this Sunday? Can the Minister give this House and Canadians that important assurance?

Hon. Jean J. Charest (Minister of State (Youth)) and Minister of State (Fitness and Amateur Sport): Mr. Speaker, let me repeat the exact process. In the case of Mr. Johnson, as in the case of other athletes who are now competing in the Olympics, when a first test is positive, a whole detailed process comes into play for the B test, and that is exactly what happened in the case of Mr. Johnson. There is then an opportunity for Mr. Johnson and the Canadian Olympic Association to be heard and to present their arguments.

They had that opportunity. They were heard. The Medical Commission then reached a conclusion, transmitted that conclusion to the Executive Committee which then made a decision. That is the first decision. Once that happens, our policy since 1983—and the sanction changed in 1985-86—automatically kicks in. It automatically, in the case of Mr. Johnson, as in the case of all other athletes in Canada, applies.

Mr. Marchi: You had the option, Sir.

Mr. Charest: We applied the policy in a very consistent way as we have done for all other athletes in this country.

May I add in conclusion that, if there are any medals to be won in the category of political hypocrisy, the Liberal Party would win gold, silver, and bronze, and that is in the dope category.

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[Translation]

DISASTERS

SAINT-BASILE-LE-GRAND TRAGEDY—GOVERNMENT
COMPENSATION FOR VICTIMS—RESPECT FOR PROMISES

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister who is today responsible for the Environment.

The day after the PCB disaster at Saint-Basile-le-Grand, I asked the Government to share the cost of compensating the people affected by this disaster. The Government said yes, and subsequently, the Minister of Transport, speaking directly to the people in that area, said that the federal Government, and I quote: "... will match every dollar provided by Quebec."

My question is this: Why did the federal Government fail to keep its word?

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of National Defence gave a detailed explanation of the agreement between the federal Government and the provinces concerning federal contributions in case of disasters. I could repeat those words, Mr. Speaker, but perhaps the Hon. Member would care to read the details in yesterday's *Hansard* at page 19,773.