

Oral Questions

[Translation]

HEALTH

INDEMNIFICATION OF VICTIMS OF THALIDOMIDE—
GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a question to the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

Owing to the recent decision rendered in Great Britain which has compelled the company responsible for the distribution of thalidomide to assume the financial responsibility for afflicted children, can the minister assure the House and the country that the government is seriously considering the matter, in order to find the means to help the 82 victims of that drug who are still alive in Canada?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, as early as 1962, the Canadian government, in co-operation with the provinces, was one of the first governments in the world, I think, to develop a joint program of full services for thalidomide victims. This program is available to all thalidomide victims, and all parents of a child who has been affected by this drug may benefit from this program.

Furthermore, officials have recently held a meeting with representatives of the firm responsible for the production of this drug, and I understand that the representatives of this firm are negotiating with the parents of all these children in order to come to a settlement in this matter.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Is the hon. member rising on a question of privilege?

Mr. Nielsen: Yes, I am, Sir. It is understandable that the backbenchers on the other side might not have full opportunity to obtain information but it is carrying things a little to the extreme for parliamentary secretaries to set up questions and answers like this. The next thing that will happen is that we will have ministers asking ministers questions.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

• (1500)

[Translation]

Mr. Prud'homme: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): On the question of privilege—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. This is perhaps more a point of order than a question of privilege. If the minister wishes to address himself to the point of order he may do so.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): I think Your Honour decided some time ago that parliamentary secretaries are

[Mr. Reynolds.]

entitled to put questions to ministers as long as the questions are put to ministers other than their own. The hon. gentleman has been here long enough to know that this is perfectly legitimate.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, on a question of privilege—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Chair has recognized the hon. member for Saint-Denis on the point of order.

[Translation]

Is the hon. member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme) rising on a point of order?

Mr. Prud'homme: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Last week I said that unless the Chair advises us otherwise I intended to discharge my duties as well as any other member. Unless the Chair advises us otherwise, I would like to assure the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) that I fully intend to continue discharging my duties, and taking as much interest as he is taking in current problems.

[English]

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I would not want to get into any controversy with the Minister of Finance, but it is not the practice for parliamentary secretaries to ask questions in the House. I realize that they need information, but if they do not get better and more complete answers than we do from ministers they are welcome to the opportunity.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I would point out that discussion of this point of order could continue for a long time. We have gone beyond the question period. I tried to recognize the hon. member for Lethbridge at the same time that I recognized the hon. member for St. Denis. Perhaps before we call orders of the day we might give an opportunity to the hon. member for Lethbridge to ask his question.

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GRAIN

RAPESEED AND FLAX—INQUIRY AS TO PLEBISCITE ON
INCLUSION UNDER WHEAT BOARD FOR MARKETING
PURPOSES

Mr. Ken Hurlburt (Lethbridge): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was becoming a little concerned as I took my red jacket back to the rental outfit. My question is for the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board. Is the government going to initiate a plebiscite on whether rapeseed and flax should be included in Wheat Board marketing?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, as has been stated many times in the past number of months, we intend to consult producers concerning this matter. Some of the producer organizations are still quite concerned that adequate information is not available on the subject in a way which will expedite a good decision. We