

Artificial Food Additives

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): The Chair recognizes the hon. member for Welland.

Mr. S. Victor Railton (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I enter this scientific debate with a certain amount of trepidation, bearing in mind the words of the opposition House leader who suggested that one certain member now present in the House ought not to enter into a scientific discussion involving the matters the hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Yewchuk) has raised. Personally, I do not agree. I agree that the hon. member for Athabasca's background would lead to his interest in this matter. He has a scientifically trained mind. However, I took exception to the remarks of the opposition House leader, for I do not think they apply to the capabilities of the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. MacGuigan).

An hon. Member: The unwise remarks.

Mr. Railton: Yes, they were unwise remarks. The hon. member has the benefit of great legal training and experience, has no doubt been involved in the discussion of many scientific matters and is capable of digesting the material presented to this House. Frankly, the consideration of this subject requires a bit of common sense.

Mr. Yewchuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but in the absence of the opposition House leader I must object to the hon. member's misinterpreting what my House leader said. He did not in any way imply that the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. MacGuigan) was not qualified to speak. He said they were both equally qualified to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): That is a point of debate.

● (1640)

Mr. Railton: I will not say anything more about that. I feel that the point I made is well taken. There were several questions raised by the hon. member. The first was in the latter part of October with regard to the study of food additives and hyperkinetic children as well as the effects of diets on adults, and drug therapy and so on. On November 18 last many questions were asked about the effects of Amaranth or Red Dye No. 2, and Ponceau Red Dye No. 4, and again whether carbon black had any effects on the health of the population. Again there were questions about the possible existence of co-carcinogens in the Canadian food supply, wanting to know what research the Department of National Health and Welfare is doing. There were similar questions about the research projects with regard to additives in the Canadian food supply and, finally, the effect of chloroform added to certain things.

These are good questions. The hon. member for Athabasca has the right to ask them. On the other hand, I think I can say that the Department of National Health and Welfare is no doubt looking into all these things. It makes the statement that it has.

[Mr. Yewchuk.]

The Department of National Health and Welfare just does not consist of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde). There are many, many people who are experts in science, not only clinical medicine but scientific research into all the aspects which the hon. member previously mentioned. He has no difficulty finding experts. They will give us the latest reports on their own experimental work as well as scientific review.

The department is quite aware of the fear in society about the effect of red dyes. A great deal of this is as a result of exaggerated publicity.

There is talk about labelling, but nothing has been proven that the red dye is harmful. Let us be sensible in our questions about this matter. First the metabolic effects or pharmacokinetic qualities of Amaranth or Red Dye No. 2 are being investigated right now in a variety of animal species. This is being done under the supervision of the Department of National Health and Welfare. As far as the tests to date are concerned, there have been no untoward effects noted in any of the tests. This fits in with other tests in other areas of the world.

Second, there are studies they are doing on research into the purity of the dye. There is no doubt that some of the effects ascribed to the dye have been due to the impurities in the additives which contain the dye. Not only are they doing these other chemical tests, but also microbial tests, trying to see if they have any potential on affecting the chromosomes or the future health genetically of the population.

As far as the tumor forming effect is concerned, I do not mean just carcinogenic but the causation of any kind of tumor practically. They have been carrying this out using a large number of cats as the test species. These tests have been completed. It seems there will be a report soon. So far, there seems to be no indication that there is this quality in the food additives, if pure.

The next question was about Red Dye No. 4. There are no adverse effects noted in the past regarding cancer or reproduction, nor is there any new evidence to suggest this colour poses a health risk. It is not used very often.

You have to ask how many people eat a great deal of food containing red dye? Has it ever been proved that the amount of red dye in use has really increased, not just because of the increase in population, but in effect in the food they are eating? Has it ever been found that this type of "hyperkineticity" or the hyperkinetic child is found to be more frequent than ever before? It is one of these things that have been picked up in the last 20 years or so. We have no statistics whatsoever to show that this is on the increase. You have to go into those things.

There is the other question about the effects of carbon black. There is evidence in the literature to suggest that carbon black may actually protect experimental animals from the effects of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon content or impurities.