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DANGEROUS PRODUCTS

SOLVENT SNIFFING DEATHS IN MANITOBA

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, the Winnipeg Anti-Sniff Coalition, an association of some 60 groups and individuals working for prevention of solvent abuse in the Winnipeg area, has seen its efforts get bogged down over the years in a jurisdictional quagmire that appears to have no end.

Years of work to get a municipal by-law regulating the sale of sniff to minors, accomplished in 1979, were frustrated in 1982 when the Manitoba Court of Appeal held that the matter was beyond the reach of provincial authority, and was a matter for the criminal law. Subsequent discussions between the Attorney General of Manitoba and the federal Minister of Justice in late 1982 identified the Hazardous Products Act as the vehicle for federal regulatory control, and this was also the approach recommended in a Department of Justice document on the same entitled *Legal Approach to Solvent Abuse*.

Action is now long overdue. Sniffing is again on the rise in Winnipeg. In 1983-84 there were six sniff-related deaths in Manitoba. Many other children suffer both short and long-term effects from inhaling harmful chemicals. I call on the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie) to bring in the appropriate legislation, and help put an end to this continuing tragedy, and the tyranny of commercial freedom and profit over public well-being.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

PREMIER'S TRIAL—SOLICITOR GENERAL'S MEETING WITH PREMIER

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I would like to—

An Hon. Member: Welcome Chrétien back.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): This is not going to be a funny matter.

I would like to put a few questions to the Solicitor General arising from his secret meeting with Premier Hatfield at the Chateau Laurier hotel on the night of October 7. Our purpose in pursuing this matter over the past two weeks has been to ensure that all Canadians are treated equally before the law, and to ensure that the senior law officers of the Crown adhere to that principle.

Oral Questions

At the time of the meeting the Solicitor General knew that an investigation was under way by the federal police. He also knew that a federal charge against Premier Hatfield was pending. He also knew it was within his jurisdiction to order the police to lay a charge or not lay a charge. Did the Solicitor General not know and recognize that the sole purpose for such a meeting with a potential accused was to discuss the pending charge? Did the Solicitor General not know that the full purpose for the meeting was to attempt, surely, to influence the Solicitor General, or the RCMP, not to lay that charge, particularly when the counsel for the Solicitor General's Department was not present at the meeting, nor for the Department of Justice nor, indeed, a representative from the RCMP?

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I will endeavour to answer the Right Hon. Member's questions. First, I must correct him. It was not a secret meeting.

As a former Minister of Justice he should know that it is not within the purview or the ability of a Solicitor General to instruct whether charges be laid or not. In fact that is completely devoid from my responsibilities as Solicitor General.

The purpose of the meeting, as I said already, was simply because the Premier of New Brunswick indicated that he had a matter of urgency to discuss with me. The hon. gentleman indicated to me, and I took his representation very seriously, on November 30 last, that one should not presume whether anyone is innocent or guilty unless and until all charges have been laid. That would apply equally to someone who was under investigation.

PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we are dealing here with the discretion left solely to the police under the jurisdiction of the Solicitor General as to whether to lay a charge or not lay a charge. The Solicitor General said that the reason he saw the potential accused was because he was a Premier. In the Solicitor General's opinion, does that not violate the principle that everyone should be treated equally before the law? More important, does that not violate, and I use the words of the Prime Minister, the sacred principled that justice should not only be done but be seen to be done?

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I want to come back, with all deference and respect to my right hon. friend, for whom I have great respect, and state that I believe there is a fundamental misunderstanding as to the role of the Solicitor General. I repeat, in no way do I have prosecutory discretion or jurisdiction to instruct the RCMP to lay charges, whom to charge, or indeed as to whether charges would be laid. My responsibility is the practice, and procedures, and policies. I say to him no. I do not see anything different about seeing a Premier, except that under our system a Premier is worthy of a great deal of respect. Any