

Private Members' Business

for a white Canada, the protection of white labour and the absolute exclusion of Asiatics".

• (1730)

As the previous speaker, the mover of the motion said, the condition of these workers was dreadful. They worked under very harsh conditions. They sometimes had to be suspended by a rope to drill holes in the rock face, and it was very difficult to find a European immigrant to do this job. Workers were given less than the rate of pay of Europeans. The company profited by about \$5 million, which was a lot of money then, by using the Chinese workers rather than the British, American, German or French workers, whom they could not get.

I quote from a book called *It is Only Fair! Redress for the Head Tax and Chinese Exclusion Act*.

Accidents were frequent. Many died of exhaustion from hard work, harsh weather, and extremely poor living conditions. Others perished in rock explosions, were buried in collapsed tunnels, drowned in rivers after falling from unfinished bridges or died from scurvy with little medical attention.

—it is estimated that at least 600 Chinese died during this railroad construction. In 1891, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Victoria arranged for the collection of more than three hundred unidentified corpses from the Fraser and Thompson canyons and these were returned to China for burial.

That was the origin of both the head tax of the 1880s and also the Chinese Immigration Act, sometimes called the Chinese exclusion act of 1923.

Some of the people who have paid that tax are still with us. One of them, Mr. Mak Kue Lep, who was first to ask for reimbursement, came to his member of Parliament, the member for Vancouver East, and asked her to raise the question. That was six years ago. He died last year, so he will not ever collect the money that he paid, which he said—I think and we think—was unjustly required of him for entering Canada. He did not ask for interest. He asked only for the money back.

Times have changed. On August 16, 1984 the Progressive Conservative Party said that it supported the introduction of an all-party parliamentary resolution which would recognize the injustice and discrimination of the head tax and the Chinese immigration exclusion act.

The Leader of the Liberal Party said the same on October 20, as did the Leader of the New Democratic Party on October 31 of that year. This year, when speaking on March 19 in Toronto, the Minister of State (Housing) said that it is long overdue that the Chinese recognize redress for the Chinese head tax:

"I want to pledge to you tonight—that this government will go forward with a redress policy for all Canadians and that redress for the head tax will be part of the policy."

As the member for Scarborough—Rouge River has told us, we have the endorsement of not dozens, but hundreds of Canadians for this very just action.

The question is, what is this government waiting for? Is the government waiting to do this on the eve of the next election? It is an urgent matter. The President of the Chinese Canadian National Council told me today that his grandfather died last fall. His grandfather was another one who paid the head tax.

The people who paid the head tax are dying off. There may be only 1,000 of them left, and if this government does not act promptly, they will all be dead. That will be a second disgrace, equal almost to the first one, because now we cannot say that we do not know any better. Therefore, I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after "should" and substituting therefor the following:

—acknowledge that the 1885 Act to Restrict and Regulate Chinese Immigration into Canada which imposed a Chinese Head Tax and the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act which excluded Chinese immigration were discriminatory against immigrants of Chinese origin and contrary to the principles now adopted and reflected in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and that the government meet with the Chinese Canadian National Council to negotiate appropriate individual and community compensation.

I have the motion here, Madam Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As soon as the motion put by the hon. member and seconded by Mr. McCurdy reaches me, I will study it and come back to the House. It will take a minute. We will reserve on the admissibility of the amendment for the time being.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Bourgault (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, I also welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate on the motion of the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River.