

*Inquiries of the Ministry*

province of Quebec following the alleged consumption of beer. Has any indication of contamination such as botulism been found as a result of the examination?

**Hon. A. J. MacEachen (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, the Department of National Health and Welfare was informed by a physician in Quebec city on March 19 that there was a hypothetical possibility of a casual relationship between beer drinking and a new form of primary cardiomyopathy. Cardiomyopathy is a subacute or chronic disorder of the heart muscle of unknown or obscure etiology.

The patients involved were reported to be in the habit of consuming large amounts of beer, in all instances not less than eight quarts per day.

An investigation was immediately launched by officers of the food and drug directorate of the department in close collaboration with the Quebec Department of Health. The physician who reported these cases has been interviewed, as well as other persons associated with the problem. The information available to the Department of National Health and Welfare indicates that there had been approximately 40 suspected cases reported over a period of a few months, with 16 to 18 deaths.

The plant producing the suspected beer was thoroughly investigated and all relevant records examined by officers of the food and drug directorate with the full co-operation of the brewing company involved. No evidence was found of any major change in the method of manufacture or the composition of the beer. Samples of all ingredients as well as the finished product were obtained, and these are now being examined in the laboratories of the food and drug directorate.

I am informed that tests have been conducted under the direction of the Quebec Department of Health for a number of metals in the finished product. Similar tests were carried out on two other brands of beer. The levels found in all cases were within the normal range.

All the alleged cases have been in the Quebec city area. The investigation is being pursued with the utmost vigour in close co-operation with the Quebec Department of Health and municipal officers of Quebec city. Hospitals and physicians responsible for the care of these patients have given all possible assistance. I have been informed that on the suggestion of the deputy minister of health

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

for the province of Quebec, a committee has been established by the pathologists of the teaching hospitals affiliated with Laval University. One of the senior members of this committee has been charged with the responsibility of pursuing a detailed pathological study of the cases involved.

No direct relationship between the consumption of the suspected beer and the cases of heart failure has been established. Other factors not yet identified may be involved in these cases.

However, the brewery involved has informed the Department of National Health and Welfare that as a precautionary measure they intend to withdraw from the market and destroy under government supervision all existing stocks of beer produced in their Quebec city plant. This is a voluntary action taken on the initiative of the company but with the full knowledge and agreement of the Quebec Department of Health and the Department of National Health and Welfare.

I thank the house for its indulgence in allowing me to give this rather detailed answer to the important question which was raised by the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Greene:** May I point out that there are never any such problems with milk.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Jack Roxburgh (Norfolk):** I should like to ask the minister whether his department is giving serious consideration to looking into the effects of the drinking of alcohol on public health in Canada. Is he putting money aside to look into the effects of drinking on health?

**Mr. Ricard:** Also tobacco.

**Mr. Keays:** Can the minister tell us whether it was bottled beer or canned beer?

**Mr. MacEachen:** I understand that the investigation has not fully disclosed the exact source, whether it was bottled, canned or draft beer, or a combination of all three.

**Hon. J. A. MacLean (Queens):** A brief supplementary question to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Can the minister say whether there are samples of this beer still available to his department for any additional tests which may be required?

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. MacLean (Queens):** Of a scientific character, of course.