

Inquiries of the Ministry

Minister or the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development consider making a statement on motions tomorrow with regard to the report on the mortality rate of Indians? The report describes the increasing mortality rate among young adults as disastrous. In the course of making such statement will either the minister or the Prime Minister make particular reference to why this report allegedly was kept under wraps for some months? Will the Prime Minister or the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development make such a statement on motions tomorrow?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I have not looked into the matter so I am not prepared to make a statement, but the minister will be in the House tomorrow and he will be prepared to answer questions then. In the meantime the Leader of the Opposition may wish to ask questions of the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, may I direct a supplementary question to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. When was this important report made available to him by the director of health services? Also, was it then immediately brought to the attention of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the mortality rates among our Indian population have never been a matter of secrecy within the government or for anybody else who has wished to inquire. We have had analyses of these rates in various reports that have been available for several years to anybody who is interested. There is nothing of a secret nature about it. What is in issue today and what is concerning the Leader of the Opposition is that these statistics were analysed in an interdepartmental memorandum that went from the Acting Director General to his zone officers across the country. The press and the media quoted the memorandum of October 20 correctly. What followed from that was a further memorandum of November 25 from the Acting Director General to the regional directors, correcting a grave error in the earlier memorandum from which I believe the hon. member for Skeena quoted. The later memorandum makes it quite clear that there was an erroneous interpretation of these statistics.

Mr. Lewis: Table it.

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Mr. Munro: Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to table both memorandums if I may have unanimous consent of the House.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Munro: Inasmuch as copies of these interdepartmental memorandums were sent to people outside the Public Service, there is no reason why they should not be tabled.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister has asked whether certain documents he has referred to can be tabled with the consent of the House. Has the minister this consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Stanfield: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I still ask whether the Prime Minister will request the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to make a statement on motions on this subject tomorrow? Also, will the Prime Minister consider a suggestion that was put forward, although in a slightly different form from mine, a few minutes ago and refer this report to the appropriate committee of the House for study and consideration? Will the Prime Minister lend his good offices to this move?

Mr. Trudeau: As I just said, Mr. Speaker, I have not inquired into the matter. I will inquire into the matter and if such appears to be the right course I will do as the Leader of the Opposition suggests. In the meantime the Minister of National Health and Welfare is prepared to answer questions.

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a supplementary question to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. In view of the disturbing aspects of this report, will the minister recommend to the cabinet a substantial increase in the budget for Indian health services?

Mr. Munro: Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to consider that course. I point out that over the last four or five years there has been approximately a 30 per cent increase in the total expenditures in this particular area. In further answer to the hon. member's question, I would like to point out that the five to one ratio quoted earlier was not correct. What the figures do show is that 3.8 Indian women in 1,000 die annually compared with 0.7 other Canadian women in 1,000.

Mr. Hees: Canadian Women?

Some hon. Members: Explain!