

Then the industries are named, such as Domtar Limited at Lebel-sur-Quevillon, about 50 miles north east of Val-d'Or, Aluminum Company of Canada Limited at Arvida, near Chicoutimi, and Strachem Limited, Beauharnois on Lake St. Louis. Of course, the most famous case of all is the Reed Paper pollution of the English-Wabigoon river system. I do not think there is a more important amendment that this House can deal with in terms of this bill and I do not think there is a more important matter to deal with than this question of the poisoning of native Canadians as the result of our rush to industrialize a part of Canada. We cannot have it both ways in this country. We who live in the south and who look to the modern industrial world to provide us with the comforts, cannot sit home quietly and have our comforts at the price of the death of the native people in this country, and that is the risk we have been running for a long time. The warnings have been there, and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Allmand) and the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) have been dragged, kicking and screaming into this issue.

● (1200)

I will not neglect the province of Ontario. I think that province has much to account for in terms of its approach to the English-Wabigoon river system. This amendment would allow the minister to prohibit fishing in any waters until such time as the amount of deleterious substances decreases and no longer constitutes a health hazard. That would mean some disruption both for native people and for people who run tourist businesses along those streams, but surely we cannot continue to pay the price of poor health among native people just to keep a few small industries going. If we are interested in the health of fish, surely we should be interested in the health of humans, and this amendment gives us an ideal opportunity to move now.

Let us remember that the power which would be given to the minister would be a discretionary power. He may close those rivers. He would not have to, but at least we would not have the jurisdictional foul-up we now have in Ontario whereby the federal government says this matter is a provincial responsibility and the provincial government says it is partly its responsibility and partly that of the federal government and that the matter should be studied further. We have studied that system long enough, and we know that native people have mercury poisoning. We know also that on the Quebec side there are areas where there is serious mercury poisoning.

From time to time it is argued that because of the division of fisheries jurisdiction the federal government cannot act. I do not think that argument will wash. The Native Indian Brotherhood presented a very articulate and well researched brief to the minister. In terms of the argument in favour of the minister's reserve jurisdiction and the whole question of being able to end fishing in streams until those streams are properly cleaned up and the health of Canadians is protected, I am very happy to endorse that brief. I do not know why this amendment was not adopted by the government when the bill was first drafted and why it was not adopted by the committee

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because it would not allow the minister to exceed his jurisdiction. It is not a mandatory provision. It would allow the minister to use his jurisdiction, and where a dispute arises, as it has with regard to the English-Wabigoon matter, the minister could clearly move to end very dangerous situations.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and the Environment (Mr. Fleming) indicated to the National Indian Brotherhood on February 1 that the government would not close the river system unilaterally. I am pleased to see the parliamentary secretary in the House today, and when he responds, as I am sure he would like to, I hope he will explain why he wrote that letter and why he rejected an amendment to the bill which would allow the minister to act unilaterally under the provisions of the bill. The government cannot have it both ways. It cannot write to the National Indian Brotherhood and say it does not have the power and then, when the brotherhood seeks to give the government that power in the form of an amendment, refuse to accept it. We are looking for a little bit of federal leadership. There must be co-operation, but the minister must clearly have reserve jurisdiction in terms of this mercury problem, which is a problem right across the country.

I have been dealing with the English-Wabigoon system because that is the system which has had the most attention here in Ontario, but there is a whole chain of poisoned rivers going from one end of Canada to the other. There is not much use in casting blame and saying that Reed Paper is the villain or that someone else is the villain. Yes, Reed Paper is the villain, but we have a very special responsibility to deal with the effects and the cause of that poisoning. Instead of keeping the price of paper low by poisoning Indians and by not putting in the kinds of devices that are needed to stop that poisoning, we in this House have a special moral responsibility to see that those streams are closed and that the natives of Canada are protected. I plead with the minister and his parliamentary secretary not to reject this amendment out of hand or on any partisan basis. Here is an opportunity to exercise leadership and not simply to say that Ontario does not really want to shut down the sport fishery and that if people eat a few of those polluted fish they will be all right. If the government says that, native people will quite rightly think that if the fish are all right for American tourists, they are all right for them. The problem continues to be compounded by a lack of leadership at the federal level.

I am not going to deal in detail with the jurisdictional argument which was presented to the minister by the National Indian Brotherhood. The position of the brotherhood is that the federal government has unilaterally abandoned jurisdiction as a result of some events which occurred a very long time ago. To me that seems to be quite a persuasive argument, and if we examine it from the point of view of the British North America Act, the jurisdiction is still clearly there. It is time the federal government stopped abandoning its powers and leaving them to the provinces. This is another opportunity for the federal government to assert itself in an area where we have not seen any federal leadership whatsoever. The federal