

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

having to do with the medical director in Moose Factory, I raised the question because of the national coverage the matter received last night on the program "The Way It Is". I think it is unfortunate that people, before trying to solve their problem in the normal process, seek widespread publicity in order to bring one side of the story before the public. Such actions sometimes arouse prejudices in the minds of those who would like to take an unbiased view of what is happening.

The members of the native band at Moose Factory sent the minister a petition. They sent a copy to me, to the C.B.C. and to others. The petition reads:

We the people of the Island of Moose Factory hereby present this petition to the Minister of National Health and Welfare, the Rt. Honourable John Munro M.P., and we demand that the Medical Director of Moose Factory General Hospital, Dr. C. K. Bridge and Assistant Zone Director, B. H. Funston be removed forthwith. We feel that we have legitimate reasons for this demand and will cite the following which are only a few examples of the misconduct and flagrant disregard for human dignity by these two men who have set up themselves as Colonial Masters of our Island.

1. Dr. Bridge refused to give medical treatment to the Indian population for which he is responsible.

2. The Minister must be aware of the death of Mrs. Minnie Cheechoo an Indian woman of the Indian reservation on December 12th, 1968. We feel that the death of this woman who left four young children is due to the direct cause of the gross negligence of Dr. Bridge.

3. After the death of Mrs. Cheechoo one of her sons were taken ill and again this child was refused ambulance service.

4. The Assistant Zone Director, Mr. Funston who is also the Administrator indulges in discriminatory practices in hiring Indian Personnel.

Again we reiterate our demand for the removal of these two men and request an investigation into their misconduct.

I have received representations from others about the operation of the hospital at Moose Factory. Perhaps the minister would be willing to allow an investigation of all these charges to be conducted. I take no sides in the matter, although I think the program last night showed one side of the story without covering adequately the other side. Certainly, when stories start to develop in small communities like Moose Factory they become exaggerated. I know the program left the impression in the minds of many that Mrs. Cheechoo died as a result of not being taken to hospital. Others claim that is not the case and that Mrs. Cheechoo would have died in any event. The latter allegation was not included on the program.

It may or may not be true that Dr. Bridge is behaving like the colonial master of the island.

[Mr. Stewart (Cochrane).]

The truth can only be discovered if the department investigates the charges. Certainly, it would not be the first time that a man from "back 'ome" has displayed an imperialistic attitude towards Canadians. I think we all have had that experience. As I say, the facts of this matter ought to be locked into.

Nevertheless, we ought to condemn no one just on the say so of one group of people. I think it is our duty to look into all aspects of this situation. Perhaps the C.B.C. which is quick to go after sensationalism will be on hand after the investigation is completed, so they can give a full and unbiased account of all the fact. I would ask the representative of the minister to give some indication as to what is being done in this regard.

[Translation]

Mr. Rosaire Gendron (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for the concern he shows more particularly for those who rank amongst the most unfortunate and forsaken in life and who, for that very reason, are in greater need of attention. I also congratulate him for putting this serious problem to the house with such calm.

I know the minister feels very deeply about this situation. He already has visited the Great Canadian North on two or three occasions, and he intends to complete his tour so that he might have visited all the areas which fall within his jurisdiction. Such visits may lead to favourable results for those who are in need of those services.

Still, it must be remembered that the Moose Factory hospital serves a large group of Indians who live partly isolated, on islands, where extremely harsh climatic conditions doubtless add to the tension and their feeling of frustration. But, because of the physical location, of the hospital, at times it is difficult to recruit personnel. Indeed, it takes great missionary spirit and much generosity to accept such isolation and devotion to the sick in underdeveloped areas.

I know that the doctor in charge is very well liked by his staff who give him their wholehearted support. Everyone recognizes his qualifications. Perhaps because he is temperamentally reserved it might be a little difficult for him to establish rapport with the local community. Still, the minister has understood the inconveniences caused by the fact that transport by ambulance was limited