

Supply—Mines and Technical Surveys

He said the rate of cancer deaths has picked up in recent years because it takes time for cancer to develop and uranium mining is a relatively young industry.

I think it would be unwise to spread fear among the miners in the uranium industry, but it would also be very dishonest if the miners in the uranium industry did not know this was a hazard of their employment. I can remember working with miners in the gold mining industry and the silica chrome industry. They entered that industry not knowing that they could get silicosis through working in the mines. Over the years controls have been developed. The use of X-rays has been made mandatory, and though there is still some complaint that the results of such X-rays are not brought to the attention of miners early enough, it is generally conceded that there has been some advance made in the control and prevention of silicosis.

When I was in the uranium producing area a year or two ago I attended a conference arranged by management and labour to consider this subject. The position taken by management was that this was their field; that the government should not legislate, but that the industry itself should take whatever measures are possible to prevent health problems developing from exposure to uranium. At that time there was some difference even among management itself as to whether employees could demand a urinalysis which would give an indication of whether radiation had produced any significant harm to an individual.

It is my opinion that the government itself will have to take a lead in this respect. Failing that, we shall find enlightened management arranging for workers in exposed areas to be given a weekly urinalysis while other management will say "We do not think these tests are necessary; the radiation is not strong enough to hurt anybody". As I understand it, arrangements for tests were to be made by the mines themselves and not by a government agency which would permit employees to undergo tests at any time they felt to be necessary.

I believe the federal government has a duty to conduct an immediate survey into the results of uranium mining on the health of workers in the industry. We have been mining uranium in Eldorado for 15 or 20 years, and there are miners who have worked for that length of time in the industry. There are others who, while they have been employed in the industry for a shorter period, have undergone a more concentrated exposure. The federal government never did undertake as much work in the development of silicosis control as it should have. We have been puttering along with the research which was

[Mr. Peters.]

done at McIntyre, aluminum dust therapy which many miners believe is ineffective and even harmful, because when you add any foreign substance to the lungs an additional risk is created since the lungs were not designed to handle foreign substances.

It seems to me that this is a national problem. I believe the minister is sympathetic, and if he wishes to give direction there is a great deal which can be done. In Germany research is still being carried out in the problem of silicosis in the mines. They are also continuing to pay pensions to those who have been exposed to an overdose of aluminum dust. We in this country may be guilty of behaving unscrupulously toward our miners when we arrange for aluminum dust to be pumped into their lungs. It is not taken voluntarily; it is compulsory, because the miners have to pass through the dryer where this dust is used. I suggest this practice is only as common as it is in Canada because the federal government has not carried out the work which it should have done in order to ascertain whether the use of this dust is advantageous.

I will agree that the incidence of silicosis has greatly decreased in the mining industry in Canada, but I think we must look at these figures not only in the light of the use of aluminum powder as a prophylactic treatment but in the light of increased ventilation in the mines and the increased use of water to keep down the dust. I suggest it is the duty of the minister in the light of all the facts now available to take another look at this question, because while it is true that fewer people are dying of silicosis there has been a great increase in death through heart diseases and other forms of diseases of the lungs. All these factors may be covering up the apparent decrease in the importance of the silicosis problem.

For these reasons I should like to ask the minister to comment on the work his department is doing with respect to the risks to health involved in uranium mining and, particularly, on the incidence of lung cancer which now appears to be forming an important part of this problem in the United States. The article to which I have referred says that in the United States both federal and state governments have set up controls to curb the rate of cancer among uranium miners. I wonder whether the minister has done any similar work in his department. The problem will be worse in Canada than it is in the United States since the concentration of uranium oxides is greater here than it is in the United States.

The Chairman: May I interrupt the hon. member at this point. He has probably said