

some suspicion that part of this has been caused by the build-up of the mercury in their systems. It has only been in the past two or three months, after a great deal of pressure brought by the Indian reserves in the area, the provincial government has agreed to hold an inquest into the deaths of a number of people who died under what can only be termed as unusual circumstances. That inquest, the first, will be held some time later this month. The Indians themselves, their Indian organizations—Grand Council Treaty No. 3—have been most active, most concerned and most worried about the fact that the effect of the mercury build-up in the body may have something to do with some of the diseases and difficulties these people have been suffering.

It is not good enough for us to say we should compensate these Indian people because something more important is at stake. What has happened as a result of this mercury contamination is that not only have we destroyed the livelihood of these people in terms of the commercial fishery and the tourist industry but, more important, we have also destroyed what the Indians feel most keenly, their way of life. It is now no longer possible for these people to live off the land and supplement their diet and income by living off the land as they did in the past. So the hurt to these people goes far beyond anything we might be able to compensate in terms of money. When these people appeal to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien) I hope he will be as generous in providing assistance to them as he has been to the Cree from James Bay in giving them the funds or the means by which to fight their battle in the courts of Quebec against the massive power diversion project.

There is one final point on this problem. The tourist industry represented through its association, the Kenora District Camp Owners' Association, has been petitioning the Ontario government to provide assistance, help and guidance. Their problem is simple. The tourist industry in my area at the present time is based to a large degree on fishing. The commercial fisherman perhaps sells his catch at an average price of 50 or 60 cents a pound while the tourist who comes and catches fish, which he takes home to show his friends, finds that the fish cost him about \$10 a pound. This valuable industry is based upon the eating of fish, shore lunches and the taking back of fish to the homes of the tourists in the United States. Sports fishing is permitted by the Ontario government but not for eating. The federal government does not permit the sale of fish caught containing over .5 parts per million, while the Ontario government permits fish caught under Tourist Auspices above that scale to be eaten. This is also a commercial transaction. It seems to me it involves a moral question which must be faced.

I feel that governments cannot allow double standards of this nature to develop. It is a question of moral responsibility. It seems to me that the area ought to be closed to all fishing until the Ontario government or the federal government is prepared to say that the rate of mercury contamination in the fish is low enough for it to be eaten by individuals without any harm to their health. Now, the situation is ambiguous and unusual. It seems to me it is morally indefensible. The camp owners and the Indians have been working on this.

The Address—Mr. Wagner

My last point concerns the responsibility of the federal government in dealing with this case. I believe that under the constitution fishing is a matter of federal responsibility although in the case of the provinces they have responsibility over the waterways and I understand responsibility for the fishery has been delegated to the provinces. Nevertheless there is a clear federal responsibility because fish basically are a federal responsibility even though it has been delegated to the provinces which have primary responsibility.

The second point is that the waterway in which this has happened is an interprovincial waterway. The Wabigoon River and the English River system flow into the province of Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg. Here it has caused a considerable problem of mercury pollution. It seems to me the federal government, if it is requested by the provinces concerned, cannot refuse to participate in any program of rehabilitation and/or compensation if that is requested. The federal government ought to be prepared to provide assistance to these people when it is required because in my opinion there is a definite federal interest involved.

In the throne speech the government announced it has a number of measures with which it wanted to deal. One that caught my attention was the provision of a series of regional conferences to deal with transportation problems in Canada. Transportation is very important in my constituency and in all of northwestern Ontario. I know the federal proposition is to meet with the provinces in terms of regions. That would mean that the prairie provinces would be a region and that Ontario would be a region. Northern Ontario, however, is a bridge between the heartland of Ontario, or the golden horseshoe, and the Prairies. The problem is that transportation rates have been calculated in a way that has discriminated against those communities which have their existence on this bridge. Transportation rates have not been calculated to provide those communities in northern and northwestern Ontario proper consideration and proper rates in proportion to other communities in Canada.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt the hon. member but the time allotted to him has expired. He may continue if there is unanimous agreement. Is this agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Bell: No.

• (1230)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Wagner (Saint-Hyacinthe): Mr. Speaker, I hasten to extend my respectful greetings to you, not merely in keeping with etiquette and established usage, but because I have already recognized that you possess the intellectual and moral qualifications that make an impartial and respected mediator.

I also extend these sentiments to the Deputy Speaker of the House (Mr. McCleave), an unanimously esteemed and appreciated colleague. I congratulate the government on its non-partisan action and hope the precedent set will be followed. If the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker can be so readily replaced, why could this not apply also to the