

*Inquiries of the Ministry*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I suggest the question might go on the order paper. I do not expect that the hon. member really looked for an answer off the cuff.

**INDIAN AFFAIRS****NORTHERN B.C.—ALLEGED LACK OF  
MEDICAL SERVICE**

On the orders of the day:

**Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena):** Mr. Speaker, before the orders of the day are called I wonder if I could direct a question to the Minister of National Health and Welfare and ask the minister whether his attention has been drawn to a news item in yesterday's *Ottawa Citizen* emanating from Fort Nelson, British Columbia, which indicates that a Dr. Raymond March said yesterday that several children died on remote northern Indian reserves this winter because a doctor could not reach them in time. Has the minister any comment to make thereon?

**Hon. J. W. Monteith (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, I have not seen this article and as a consequence have no comment to make. However, the house will recall that the hon. member for Skeena and the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate have taken up with me on previous occasions the alleged problems of the Indians of the Prophet river reserve in British Columbia. This morning I received the following further report in my capacity as Acting Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

The report from the British Columbia Indian commissioner was received by the department this morning. The commissioner reports that as of March 30, the day he visited the Prophet river community, there was no sickness in the community itself and only two of the 59 Indians living there were still in the Fort Nelson hospital.

The commissioner questioned each of the families living at Prophet river as to conditions prevailing on the week end of March 17, when the epidemic of sickness occurred. Two families are on permanent assistance, three heads of families have trap lines, and five others have been employed at a saw mill a short distance from where they live. All heads of families confirmed that they had not been suffering from any shortage of food prior to the time when they were taken ill.

The agency superintendent or his representative has visited the community each month, except for December, since last October. The provincial public health nurse visited early in March and reported nothing usual. In addition, a school teacher has

[Mr. Fisher.]

lived with the Indians in the community at Prophet river throughout the winter, and has been in a position to report any health or welfare conditions requiring attention. Unfortunately she was absent from Prophet river on week-end leave Saturday, March 17, when the epidemic developed. The Indians therefore telephoned the doctor in Fort Nelson, Dr. March, who visited Prophet river, taking along with him the editor of the Fort Nelson newspaper.

Dr. March deserves a great deal of credit for the prompt action he took in coping with the situation which he found on arrival at Prophet river on March 18. His prompt and effective action undoubtedly was responsible for the rapid recovery of the Indians who were overtaken by illness.

At the same time it seems clear from reports received from the commissioner, from the provincial health authorities and from other independent sources that charges of malnutrition among this group of Indians, and accusations of neglect on the part of responsible officials, were not justified.

**HOUSE OF COMMONS****ESTABLISHMENT OF ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES  
COMMISSION**

The house resumed, from Monday, April 9, consideration in committee of the following resolution—Mr. Diefenbaker—Mr. Martineau in the chair:

That it is expedient to introduce a measure respecting the establishment of an electoral boundaries commission for the readjustment of representation in the House of Commons; to provide that certain members of the commission may be paid such per diem allowance as may be fixed by the governor in council; to provide for the payment of reasonable travelling and living expenses for the members of the commission; and to provide also that the commission may engage the services of such technical advisers and other staff, including a person to act as secretary to the commission, as it deems necessary.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** I do not intend to traverse today any of the ground I covered last evening except to repeat the final point I made, because unless I do so I think what I have to say would lack continuity.

I had pointed out that in almost every case since confederation, except in 1945 when a constitutional amendment had been made so that the constitution could be set aside until after the war, after the completion of the census there has been no election without first of all a redistribution. The only years in which an election came soon after the year for the taking of the census were 1872, 1882 and, of course, 1911, if one regards the taking of the census as being merely the day on which the information is collected from the population. If the date was June 1, as it is