

Adjournment Debate

cases. The minister was rather reluctant to reply to my question at the time, and he said rather facetiously:

—I suggest that people suffering from asthma should abstain from this drug for a day.

We were trying to get the question before the House as a life and death issue at that time. Later he revised his answer; he had thought better of the reply he had given, and he said:

On July 19, 1973, manufacturers of the product were advised of our intent to recommend that it be available only on prescription. Steps in this connection are under way and I expect that regulations to this effect will be passed very soon.

I have been presenting this issue since 1969, Mr. Speaker. At page 6386 of *Hansard* for March 10, 1969, there is a reply to a question I asked as follows:

The Poison Control Unit, Food and Drug Directorate, Department of National Health and Welfare has no record of sudden deaths among asthmatic patients in Canada attributable to the misuse of aerosol inhalers.

This goes back over a period of four years, but actually the medical authorities in Canada have been pressing the issue and have been urging the Department of National Health and Welfare to take some action for the past seven years. More recently the Calgary Medical Society has been pressing for tighter control. In the absence of government action on the matter and the failure of the government to respond to these overtures, the Pharmaceutical Association has been urging its members to keep the drug out of the reach of the casual customer and make it available only to people who ask for it specifically. I think this has demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt that the drug Isoprenaline is now regarded by medical authorities, as well as pharmaceutical authorities, as a potentially dangerous drug. It has been available by prescription in Europe for only a few years. It was demonstrated, by close experiment in the U.K., for example, that the death of 3,500 asthmatics over a six-year period was attributable to abuse of this drug.

● (2200)

My reason for bringing forward the subject again tonight is that I want to inquire of the minister, or the parliamentary secretary who will be replying for the minister this evening, how soon it will be possible to have this drug placed under prescription. The minister's reply suggested that this was being studied and that regulations to this effect will be passed very soon. As the matter has been under review for some seven years, and as it has now been proved beyond question that deaths have been attributable to abuse of the drug, I trust that the parliamentary secretary tonight will be able to inform the House and the people of Canada that it has now been placed under regulation and that the danger to asthmatic patients is a thing of the past.

Mr. Norman A. Cafik (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, in response to the question raised by the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) I should like to report that in the mid to late 1960s information appeared from other countries suggesting that the excessive use of aerosols containing sympathomimetic drugs may have accounted

for an increased incidence in mortality in persons suffering from asthma.

A retrospective study in Great Britain covering the period 1961 to 1967, coupled with a decrease in the incidence of mortality following a change in that country of the prescription status of Isoproterenol, tended to offer a convincing explanation for the rise and fall of sudden deaths in asthma patients. The staff of the Department of National Health and Welfare examined this data, along with Canada's statistics. This country had not experienced a similar increase in asthma deaths.

However, since 1967 four deaths appear to have been associated with the excessive use of this product in Canada and we have received representations from physicians and professional groups who feel the problem may be greater in this country than the number of deaths would appear to indicate. Therefore, in an effort to ensure the proper use of Isoproterenol by asthma patients the department has recommended that this drug be added to schedule F of the food and drug regulations, which would make it available only on a doctor's prescription. Steps are being taken to have this legislation promulgated and it is anticipated that this will be completed within a few days. Until this occurs, the advice of the department to persons with asthma is to use the product within the limitations advised by their physicians.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS—FAMINE IN ETHIOPIA—DIRECT ASSISTANCE BY CANADA

Mr. Ed Nelson (Burnaby-Seymour): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, November 16, I raised a question in the House concerning Canada's participation in supplying relief for the famine-stricken regions of Ethiopia. The matter was first drawn to my attention by a national television program and by letters and telegrams from constituents. Since then several other hon. members have indicated concern on the part of their constituents. The minister's reply seemed inadequate and I therefore asked for this opportunity to debate the question.

Briefly, my understanding of the situation is this. Between 50,000 and 100,000 people have died of famine and drought, mainly in Wallo province, Ethiopia. This province is inhabited mainly by Moslem or Pagan tribes. The Ethiopian Christian Church, which is one of the major sources of information for the government, does not have effective communication with the province of Wallo. Moreover, the local governor suppressed the true nature of the emergency and is now either dismissed or imprisoned; it is not clear which. Other factors are suggested, including indifference on the part of the central government and the fierce pride of the people of Wallo.

It is also reported that some 17 students who were demonstrating against the cover-up of the facts surrounding the famine were killed at Dessye, the capital of Wallo province, following refusal of the acting governor general to discuss the famine with them. I have very little knowledge of the politics of that country, but have been told that there exists a situation in which a handful of absentee native nobility exact an exorbitant tribute from the population. However, I have no details. In any event, we do not ask about the politics of starving people.