

writing and into the hands of House leaders and into caucus before noon tomorrow. By three o'clock tomorrow when the order is called there could be comment on these groupings, and then we would resume discussion on the four motions before the House at the present time.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS—REQUEST THAT ENGLISH AND WABIGOON RIVERS BE DECLARED WATER QUALITY CONTROLLED ZONES

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to raise this issue on the adjournment debate because of a question I put to the Minister of the Environment (Mr. Marchand) earlier today concerning the mercury poisoning in the English and Wabigoon river systems in northwestern Ontario. I was not satisfied with the answer I received. The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) was also involved in some of the questions I asked earlier today and I thought his attitude typified the attitude of the federal government when he disputed the finding of the mercury poisoning specialist, Dr. Newberry, that the first case of the dreaded Minamata disease had been diagnosed in northwestern Ontario.

The attitude of the federal government in this whole matter of mercury poisoning has been one of extreme caution. Ministers will not take effective initiatives until in their own minds absolute proof is there that we have mercury poisoning among the inhabitants of these Indian reserves.

I submit the proof is staring the government in the face. The symptoms of Minamata disease and of mercury poisoning—that is to say, numbness of the limbs and lips, slurred speech, tunnel vision, difficulty in walking and co-ordination, and in extreme cases fits and ultimately death, are there and have been documented.

I fail to see how the federal government can persist in denying there is a problem with Minamata disease in light of the expert testimony of visiting Japanese doctors who are familiar with the problem, and of this most recent diagnosis by Dr. Newberry.

The attitude of the Minister of National Health and Welfare and the Minister of the Environment astounds me. It is as if they want a victim from Grassy Narrows—as if they want someone to die first so that they can have an autopsy and conclude with absolute certainty that the person died of Minamata disease. This is little consolation to the victim, Mr. Speaker.

We are facing disaster in the English and Wabigoon river system yet the government persistently refuses to take effective action. It has done so little, which in my opinion is more despicable in the face of the evidence gathered

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over the world, especially from Japan and Sweden, on the symptoms and lessons of the causes of mercury poisoning. No effective action has been taken. That is why I asked the Minister of the Environment to acknowledge federal responsibility in this matter and to exert some kind of leadership.

The provincial government of Ontario has a history of ineptitude and procrastination in dealing with mercury poisoning. In 1975 the province of Manitoba tried to sue the polluter of the river system but the supreme court ruled that because it was an interprovincial waterway, Manitoba had no jurisdiction. Therefore I suggest that it is clear that this mercury pollution comes under federal jurisdiction. We are dealing with an interprovincial waterway, and no longer can the federal government say that it is a provincial matter and pass the buck in this fashion. We have heard that only the federal government can take effective action and provide leadership.

What has the federal government, especially the federal Ministry of the Environment, done? May I quote from the submission prepared by the National Indian Brotherhood for the research directorate of the Department of National Health and Welfare? I quote:

On November 24, 1971, Minister of the Federal Environment set chlor-alkali mercury effluent standards. On March 26, 1970, the Ontario Ministry of the Environment issued a control order under section 50 of the OWRC Act re: Dryden Chemicals Ltd., stating that no mercury-contaminated brine is to be discharged to the environment under any circumstances . . .

According to EPS of Environment Canada, no independent cross-check of effluent data (collected and analysed by the company and sent to the Ontario and then to the federal government) has been done.

Therefore, on April 13, 1975, NIB sampled the effluent of Dryden and McMaster University analysed this sample twice giving values of 15.0 and 17.5 ppb mercury. NIB calculations based on company data for flow rates yielded a daily discharge of 7.46 pounds of mercury which is in great excess of the federal regulations of .005 pounds of mercury per ton of Cl² per day.

We have seen in the past that the federal standards have not been lived up to by the company, yet the federal government has taken no effective action. I submit the Minister of the Environment has authority under the water management legislation to declare the English-Wabigoon river system a water control management area. Section 9 of the act says that in the case of any waters other than federal waters the water quality management of which becomes a matter of urgent national concern, the minister may set up water quality zones. If the incidence of mercury poisoning is not a matter of urgent national concern, I do not know what is.

The act is wide in scope, allowing the minister to set up water control areas, to design, construct and operate water treatment facilities, to collect charges from the company for the maintenance of waste treatment facilities, to monitor on an ongoing basis waste discharged into the river system, and to do such other things as are necessary to achieve effective water quality management in those waters.

The minister says that he is discussing in a broad sense this problem with the provinces. I ask if he will undertake, after discussion, to take action under the terms of the Canada water management legislation to resolve this crisis which ought not to be allowed to continue.