

Food and Drugs Act

in a controlled group. Then after that is done, this information should be pooled and made available to an international body. The minister of health has been able to avail himself of the work of a committee appointed by the college of physicians and surgeons, in the persons of Dr. Dufresne of Montreal, Dr. Sellars of the University of Toronto, and Dr. Brien of the University of Western Ontario. They are now studying the whole problem. They will make suggestions for the better control of the whole problem, which proposals can be added to existing regulations. In conclusion, I want to congratulate all levels of government, federal and provincial, on their attitude of doing everything within their power to help those little unfortunates.

Mr. J. E. Walker (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, although I do not have the technical or medical qualifications of some of the previous hon. members who have spoken, my interest and participation in this thalidomide tragedy through which we have gone in this country was, I believe, one of the earliest. At the outset I should like to bring to the attention of all hon. members of the house what I had the privilege of saying in my maiden speech when I was speaking of the thalidomide tragedy. I said at that time that "this whole affair is too personal a grief for the thalidomide families for any party in this house to attempt to use it in any manner as a weapon with which to pound the government, and I suggest that anyone who would endeavour to do so would bring upon himself the disgust of all decent people". I regret, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) felt it was necessary to take what I feel is a retrograde step in this whole tragedy and go back to the place where we were last July, when public utterances were made by some people who were not personally acquainted with this tragedy, and attempt to find out who was to blame and leave it at that.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that at this time I should put on record some of the things which happened as far as I personally was concerned, and recount the efforts I made on a bipartisan basis, which met with some success owing to the fact that they were made on a bipartisan and non-political basis. I think it is time to put some of these things on record so that at no time in the future will any hon. member of this house feel that this tragedy can be used as a springboard for criticism in what I consider to be an unfair manner.

As far back as July 29 I wired the Prime Minister, having been brought in personal

touch with the thalidomide tragedy through constituents of mine, a young couple who were one of the first victims in the Toronto area, I believe. I wired the Prime Minister and said:

Urgently request your direct interest and intervention in thalidomide babies tragedy. I have personally investigated one of these cases in my constituency of York Centre and am convinced, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that immediate and continuing measures for the correction of this developing tragedy is a national responsibility. Young mothers who, in good faith, used this government-approved drug must of necessity look to that same government for assistance. Without attaching blame to anyone, let us now all accept the fact that a mistake has been made and proceed to correct it in so far as material assistance can do so. The parents of these babies have a lifetime of special care and responsibility in helping their child fit into a world of physically whole people. The rest of Canada through its government can help in a number of other ways. I suggest that the government take the lead in immediately organizing small regional committees of volunteer doctors, drug company representatives and national health officials to arrange and carry out, on a permanent basis, clinical treatment and rehabilitation care for these babies. I will make myself available in any capacity in which you may feel I can be of assistance.

I received a reply from the Prime Minister and I came to Ottawa. I cannot be accused of being uncritical of the government in other areas. However, I am happy to report to the house that the Prime Minister made it possible for an immediate meeting with the minister of health at which time I presented a brief on some of the things that I felt might be brought up at the conference of health officials from the various provinces. It is on this level that I feel we must deal with the thalidomide business. I would hope that we have now heard the last of the talk of who is to blame and of what happened back in July. I hope that those who have just agreed with my last remarks may agree with my future remarks. I am still pressing for the government at the national level to take the full, final and ultimate responsibility to see that the program of rehabilitation will be carried out as the prime responsibility of our federal government.

In my brief which I submitted to Dr. Cameron who was convening the provincial and federal welfare officials meeting I made reference to the following points, and I should like to put them on record:

1. The assurance that the national government will lead and direct, with the co-operation of all concerned—including the drug companies involved—a national plan of assistance, care and rehabilitation which will be greeted with a sigh of relief by the growing number of confused and frantic parents.

2. Only the national government has the power, strength and authority that may be