Re: Paradis G. Ban All Production and Export of Chrysotile Asbestos [Editor's Page]. *Can J Public Health* 2010;101(5):352.

Dear Editor:

Your organization [Canadian Public Health Association, publisher of CJPH], the Canadian Cancer Society and the Canadian Medical Association are to be commended for having aligned themselves with the United Nations agencies and the European Union in their call for the elimination of the use and exportation of asbestos, and for the proper management of asbestos that has been used, including remediation. It remains for Canada to end its contribution to an epidemic that it initiated and has promoted for over a hundred years.

Many millions of dollars have been spent on Canadian institutions that regularly reported to the effect: "...à part ça, madame la Marquise, Tout va très bien, tout va très bien". Denial was the Canadian stance as early as 1912¹ and it continues to this day to be the stock in trade of its public relations lobbyists. Inquiries into the adverse effects of chrysotile by the Province of Quebec in 1976 and by the Ontario Royal Commission in 1984 were effective public

relations exercises in that they did not provoke an outcry or impair exports. Claims for there being honest intellectual doubt about the need to operate a worldwide ban were being made by the CMA as late as 2001 when its Journal debated: 'Should Canadian health care professionals call for a worldwide ban on asbestos?' Despite the authoritative opinions of the UN and the EU, the CMA expressed the need for a panel of experts with no "significant experience or interest in asbestos research" [sic] to review the public health implications of asbestos and the efficacy and the hazards of alternative materials.

A case could be made for Canada making amends by establishing a Truth Commission serviced by a prestigious 'panel of experts'. Its remit would be to review all the factors that allowed the continued production of asbestos for over one hundred years, in the face of accumulating evidence. Such a body could determine the lessons to be learned from the asbestos epidemic and provide guidance on how not to repeat history.

Morris Greenberg, MB, FRCP, FFOM. London, England

REFERENCE

1. Department of Labour. *Labour Gazette*. February 12, 1912.

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