

*The Address—Mr. Firth*

This example goes back to October 9, 1970, when the former leader of this party, Mr. David Lewis, the then hon. member for York South, asked a question of the then minister of Indian affairs and northern development as reported at page 16 of *Hansard*. It is now October, 1976, six years down the pipe, and still no answer has been received on this very important matter. Let me put the question on the record. The then hon. member for York South asked:

Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development on a rather serious matter. Is the minister aware that a program of sterilization of native Eskimo women was apparently introduced in the Holman Island community on Victoria Island, that five women have been so sterilized and that some others are being considered? If he is aware, will he inform the House who authorized this unnecessary and inhuman program, in view of the availability of birth control methods?

The minister at that time was the present Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Chrétien), and he answered as follows:

Mr. Speaker, I have no information on this problem. The hon. member was kind enough to give me notice of his question, so I have had an investigation made but I have not yet received any report.

I am not aware that any authorization was given by my department. Health services in the Northwest Territories are under the jurisdiction of the Department of National Health and Welfare. I therefore asked one of my department's officers this morning to get in touch immediately with the representatives of the department of national health in order to determine whether any authorization had actually been given or whether the facts alleged by my hon. friend were correct.

As soon as I obtain further information, I shall be happy to inform the House, but, at this time, I do not believe that such an authorization was given. If such action took place it must have been because of some local or individual initiative, rather than under a government policy.

So at that date the Liberal government said it did not have a policy of sterilization of native women in the Northwest Territories. Although the question was asked six years ago, there has still been no answer. I have good reason to believe that a sterilization program has been continuing in the Northwest Territories and that a lot of people have been sterilized. People in the north, as well as myself, are asking for answers to a lot of questions.

I do have a few figures before me, Mr. Speaker, but they cover only a small part of the Northwest Territories. As an example of what appears to be happening in the north, in Repulse Bay, out of 22 women between 30 and 50 years of age, 10 have been sterilized—a percentage of 45 per cent. In Chesterfield Inlet, out of 23 women between 30 and 50, 6 have been sterilized, for a percentage of 26 per cent. In Pelly Bay, out of 18 women between the ages of 30 and 50, five have been sterilized, or 27 per cent. In Gjoa Haven, out of 41 women between 30 and 50, 13 have been sterilized, or 31 per cent.

● (1440)

The numbers have been quoted in the *Sunday Express* and other newspapers. The question of the sterilization of native women in the Northwest Territories has been raised by the Inuit Tapirisat, the representative of the northern peoples of those parts. The question was also mentioned in the *Sunday Express* and in the *Globe and Mail* and was brought to my attention by Father Lechat, a well respected and well known

[Mr. Firth.]

man of the north. He is concerned about this problem and raises many questions about it.

I ask the government, which has not answered questions concerning this area as well as other areas, does this represent government policy? Is this, indeed, policy? If so, how many people have been affected by it? How long has this program been going on, and why is it being carried out? Are white people involved in it as well? Is the program being explained to people taking part in it? Do the women who have been sterilized know exactly what the consequences are? Do they understand fully what it is all about? Has it been explained to them in terms they can understand? I know these are difficult questions to answer.

I know of a white lady who discussed this question with doctors, friends and others experienced in the area. She decided, after consultation, to go through with the operation, but said sometime afterwards that if she had known exactly what its consequences would be, how it would change her, she would never have agreed to go through with it.

The government has not been able to say whether this is policy. I wonder if the government has the guts to undertake an inquiry, find out exactly what is going on and explain to the Canadian people what this is all about. When you couple what is happening with ideas put forward in a training manual for the correctional institute in Yellowknife, a manual which describes the native people as shiftless, lazy and goodness knows what else in unkind terms, you wonder how many sick people, including civil servants, in those parts are making major decisions affecting the people's lives. Therefore, I ask the government to look seriously at that program and let us know exactly what is happening.

I now touch upon another area of concern—housing. In March 1974—and the year was fairly exciting in this House, as I recall—the minister responsible for housing announced that 50,000 units in a five-year period would be built under the government's rural and native housing program. The program itself was under Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Unfortunately, the program has not worked. It seems that the program is in a shambles. It has operated almost for two years. I do not know how many houses were built under it, but I have not seen any in the north, the one place in which they ought to be built.

Housing everywhere is a basic human right. This being a cold country, housing programs should be given greater priority. We need good housing programs in all parts of the country. We need a super-good housing program in the north, where the climate is extreme. Housing is in short supply in many areas, including mine. Adequate housing can help us solve many of the social ills afflicting people in various parts of the country. Good housing helps to keep the basic family unit together. Good housing would keep our native peoples together and improve their health conditions. Good housing, and improvements in health, enable people to do better work and keep their jobs. I know of many in my constituency who could do good work, but cannot because they lack adequate housing. These people cannot hold on to better jobs because they have