

is struck, when the minister comes to deal with the Indian Act he will have a very difficult time indeed. It is clear one issue is related to the other in terms of the over-all quality of the relationship between the Indian people and the government. It is very important that the constitutional process be dealt with in a constructive manner so that when the minister comes to deal with legislation he has a constructive relationship to rely upon, in terms of working out those amendments with the Indian people.

The minister made reference to improvements and optimism. I think there is certainly a role they can play. That is not the only side of the coin. Clearly, we would not be talking about the conditions of Indian people without those conditions continuing to be serious and calling for a serious response.

The minister referred to Indian involvement in oil projects. My colleague, our energy critic, referred to that in question period today. I have in my hand a letter from the vice-president of the Indian Association in Alberta which is addressed to the premier of that province. It outlines the very serious conditions which Indian people continue to suffer in that province, including, among other things, an increasing mortality rate. In other words, in the province in which there is the greatest economic boom presently in this country, the conditions of Indian people continue to deteriorate. We are talking about very serious, and not always improving, conditions when we talk about the conditions of Indian people. This has obviously been well-documented over the years.

The minister's own report on Indian conditions, while pointing to some improvements, obviously outlines very serious problems which continue to exist. These problems call for serious attention. They are not only dealt with in the minister's report but there was also a report on Indian and Inuit health conditions which outlined, elaborated and sketched the completely intolerable conditions under which Indian people live in this country.

While making these introductory remarks I would like to say that there is obviously some validity to the claim that there are some improvements. We continue to face problems which are very serious and intolerable. These problems require attention. I would like to focus my remarks on Indians in the urban situation since that is much closer to my own experience. It is the general deterioration of the conditions under which Indians live in a rural setting which causes the migration to cities. Whether they are status Indians or non-status they come to cities with a great deal of hope. They come in search of better housing, better jobs, and better living conditions.

In the cities, status Indians face some special problems, some of which relate to the jurisdiction the federal government has over Indians and the jurisdiction provincial governments have with regard to social matters. I am thinking now of child welfare. I know that in my home province the provincial government tends to deal with the problem of Indians and child welfare on reserves only in emergency situations. There is a gap in the services, and a serious problem arises. What tends to happen is that rather than the problems being dealt with, the federal and provincial governments deal with the problems

of status Indians, where there is this conflict of jurisdiction, more in terms of a revenue problem about who is responsible financially. As a result, the Indian people and the Indian children get caught in the middle and fall between the chairs.

More specifically in dealing with the resolution, I note that it refers to self-reliance. My understanding of that term is that it calls upon the government to assist Indian people in their own self-help efforts. The reason I translate the word "self-reliance" into "self-help" is because I am afraid of the attitude which might prevail in one saying that self-reliance means we no longer have access to public funds in order to cope with the problems which we face. I think that is a real possibility since I know, with regard to the provincial government in Manitoba, under the premiership of Mr. Lyon, the approach there is really one that could be described as a freedom to starve, to be self-reliant in that sense. That is certainly not the sense in which I am speaking to the motion.

● (1700)

When that government came into office in Manitoba, the first thing it did was cut off many of the very valuable services to the Indian people, particularly those in northern, remote communities of the province. This has only helped to stimulate further the migration to the cities. Certainly, it is not the sense of self-reliance to which I am speaking here, and that is why I specify "self-help" as opposed to the word "self-reliance" which is in the motion.

While Indian people suffer under very grave social conditions, they should no longer be referred to as victims. It is useful to adopt the notion of the Indian as victorious, as the survivor, and as the person who is growing and coping better with these very difficult problems. It is important because in instances when the social problems which Indian people face are listed, it is often felt by Indian people to be a put-down. Obviously, we must face these very serious social problems in the light that Indian people are no longer simply victims of those problems, but are turning the situation around and coping with their problems much better than ever before.

In order for the Indian people to cope with these problems, the government assistance or public assistance must be effective. Indian people require the assistance of their fellow citizens in order to cope with these problems. The problems faced by Indian people in the cities are of a global nature and embrace such areas as education, employment, difficulties with the criminal justice system, lack of adequate social services and all the problems a person can face. Indians face these problems particularly in cities in the west, but also in many other Canadian cities such as Montreal. Of course in the west Indians in Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver face these problems. All these cities have large Indian populations.

These very serious problems require immediate and urgent attention. Since the government is aware of these problems, it is incumbent upon it to take action which is appropriate to the size and urgency of the problems. I have seen no evidence of this action so far. When the Indian Conditions Report was