

Unemployment

I can use the words he has used time and time again: This is only a start and not the end; it is only the start towards a better future.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[Translation]

SUBJECT MATTER OF QUESTIONS TO BE DEBATED

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 40, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for North Vancouver-Burnaby (Mr. Cook)—Housing—Effect of inflation on industry and home owners; the hon. member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert)—Royal Canadian Mounted Police—Possibility of compensatory payments to Ontario and Quebec; the hon. member for Brampton-Georgetown (Mr. McDermid)—Supply and Services—Re-opening of contract to construct F-18 fighter aircraft.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY S.O. 58—FUTURE FACING UNEMPLOYED
CANADIANS

Consideration resumed on motion of Mr. Hawkes.

Mr. Jack Shields (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to address the motion which is before the House at the present time. I know that a number of things have been said about the rising unemployment, which is increasing right across Canada.

In his remarks the minister compared unemployment conditions in Canada with those in Great Britain. I suggest it is a real fallacy to compare a country such as Canada, a relatively new country with boundless resources from coast to coast, indeed offshore as well, with a country like Great Britain, with its economic conditions and hardships. I suggest that the government is not addressing itself to the problems that face us today in Canada right across this country. The number of programs which have been introduced by this government, notably the National Energy Program in the budget of last fall, have clearly done nothing but put a damper on the economic growth which could be taking place in this country from coast to coast.

I would like to limit my remarks to a problem which I see increasing very drastically. It is borne out very clearly in documentation from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Before I continue I would like to provide a bit of the background. In the past two weeks members of the Bigstone band, which is a small reserve in northeastern Alberta led by Chief William Beaver, walked 240 miles from the reserve to the city of Edmonton, specifically to the Department of Indian Affairs office, to draw attention to their plight. I am talking about living conditions but, more important, their walk has been termed "a walk for economic equality". Their chant has been: "We want jobs, we want jobs." There is a fallacy abroad in our land, and unfortunately some people believe it—one wonders if members of the government believe it as well—that Indians are lazy and do not want to work. I would like to remind the government that Indian people who walk 240 miles to demand jobs are not lazy. These people are sincere in their efforts to gain economic equality with their white brothers.

Mrs. Appolloni: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member opposite has just accused Liberal members of saying that Indians are lazy. No Liberal member has said that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. The hon. member for Athabasca.

Mr. Shields: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is obvious that the hon. member who rose on a point of order was not listening to my remarks. I suggest that rather than stand behind the curtain she remain in her chair; then perhaps she will hear what I have to say.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shields: I would like to talk about social conditions on Indian reserves. My statistics come from a survey conducted by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Life expectancy is a reflection of health standards or living conditions. For Indians, life expectancy is ten times less than it is for the rest of the population. Violent deaths on reserves are three times higher than the national average. Suicides, and in particular suicides in the 15 or 24 years age group, are more than six times higher than the national rate.

Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, a 15 or 16 year-old waking up some morning and seeing abject poverty, total futility in their lifestyle and living conditions, lack of opportunity, and deciding that he or she will commit suicide. The situation has reached almost epidemic proportions on Indian reserves. You cannot go to a reserve where the people have not experienced the tragedy of a young person committing suicide. In a country like ours, in the year 1981, that situation is absolutely atrocious. The strength and stability of family units appears to be eroding. There is a higher divorce rate, more births outside of marriage and more children in care. These are the social conditions which exist.

The next statistic I want to give you, Mr. Speaker, is probably the most significant one since it alone comments on