

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

INDIAN AFFAIRS—WITHDRAWAL OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES FROM NATIVES IN MANITOBA— REQUEST FOR REVIEW AND REPORT

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, early in May I directed a question to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Buchanan) with respect to the withdrawal of the services of the Manitoba vocational rehabilitation branch from treaty Indians in the southwestern part of Manitoba. At that time the minister indicated he did not think this was the fact and gave assurances that these services would be continued to treaty Indians.

I asked a further question on May 27, and by then the minister had become aware of the facts. He defended this withdrawal of services on the basis that it would not do any substantial harm to the problem of chronic unemployment among treaty Indians in this part of Canada.

The operative date for the withdrawal of services was June 30. In the meantime some negotiations had gone on behind the scenes which indicated that the department might change its mind on the matter. It was becoming obvious that to deprive treaty Indians of those services was discriminatory and could even be dealt with by the Human Rights Commission of Manitoba.

The explanation given for the withdrawal was that the responsibility was going to be transferred to the Canada Manpower Centre in the city of Brandon. The centre stated publicly that it did not have the resources to fill the gap in this vital service that would be left on June 30. There is some reference to the Pathfinder Outreach program, which would fill the gap. Unfortunately, the Pathfinder Outreach program is presently in a sad state of disarray, because of internal difficulties.

One of the main projects to be affected is the work activity project in Brandon, which is sponsored by the province of Manitoba and the Government of Canada. Substantial sums of money have been poured into the project, which has been described as one of the most effective to be found in any area of Canada.

The friendship centre at Brandon became concerned and was in touch with departmental officials about the matter. As a result of its intervention, assurance was given in a letter sent by the regional director that, very likely, there would be some revision of thinking and there would not be complete withdrawal of this vitally important service. I have now received a letter from the friendship people indicating that the order went into effect on June 30 and that treaty Indians are no longer being given access to this program.

During the summer months the problem of unemployment appears quiescent, but the crunch will be felt in the fall, with the coming of winter. The chairman of the manpower task force on services to Indian people

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expressed the opinion that the arrangement made between the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Manitoba vocational services was the least expensive and most effective way of dealing with the problem of chronic unemployment among treaty Indians.

The fact that this sort of special arrangement serves a useful purpose in particular circumstances was demonstrated when a special arrangement was made in northern Manitoba, where there is a substantial population of treaty Indians out of work. There the Northern Manpower Corps was formed. It was jointly funded by DREE and the province of Manitoba on a 60/40 basis. I suggest that the situation in southwest Manitoba is similar in many respects, and there has to be a special arrangement to meet those particular circumstances. That is why, over the years, very close co-operation was established between the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the provincial vocational services branch.

I trust that either the parliamentary secretary or the minister will assure us this evening that what has been working satisfactorily will not be interfered with and that the atmosphere of confrontation which causes so much damage to our relations with our treaty Indians will not be worsened by any backward step. If the backward step is persisted in, the matter of course would be referred to the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, and we should face a situation of confrontation which does irretrievable damage to good relations between our treaty Indians and the general population.

Mrs. Iona Campagnolo (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Madam Speaker, in answering the hon. member I should like to point out first that there has been no withdrawal of vocational training, counselling and placement services for registered Indians of Manitoba. There is, however, a realignment of resources between the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Department of Manpower and Immigration to produce an effective delivery system for services without duplication of expenditures of federal funds. I am sure that the hon. member, who is interested in the cost effectiveness of government programs, will be happy to hear this.

In essence, as a number of Indian chiefs and band members had expressed some dissatisfaction with the provision of counselling services on their reserves by the Manitoba Vocational Rehabilitation Services, it was agreed in March, 1973, that such services by the Manitoba Vocational Rehabilitation Services would be restricted to status Indian people in urban areas and that the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development would provide such services to those Indians living on reserves. These changes were introduced on a gradually phased basis in order not to disrupt any existing services.

As the situation now stands, the Department of Manpower and Immigration is officially responsible for employment-related services to all Canadians. Moreover those status Indians who have fulfilled the urban residency requirements are also entitled to services of the Manitoba Vocational Rehabilitation Service in the same manner as any other urban residents of Manitoba. Arrangements have also been made that counsellors of Indian Affairs would assist any status Indians who do not