

Supply

Rather than having that role recognized, apart from a belated recognition of Louis Riel, the Métis people continue to struggle with the fact that they experience all the disadvantages of aboriginal life—the racism, the economic deprivation and the lack of access to their historical resources—while at the same time they enjoy very few of the benefits that accrue to people under treaty.

I recognize that there are tripartite agreements under way. Nevertheless the situation in Métis communities is extremely acute because for 100 years there have existed no mechanisms by which those people, who have been the harbingers of change in this country, can even meet their basic needs.

I would also like to turn to the issue of what happened in the recent estimates that the government placed before the House and in the economic statement that the Minister of Finance presented to this House in December.

As previous speakers have pointed out, there were some very startling numbers in those estimates that were presented to us. On the one hand, there was a 31 per cent cut in the Indian affairs budget for economic development. It was a cut of approximately \$21 million. There was also a cut in the aboriginal economic program, CAEDS, which amounted to approximately another \$6 million. So \$27 million to \$28 million was cut in economic development.

What does economic development mean? It means that people will be able to take control of their own lives. It means that the bread-winners in these families can provide for their own families. It means that there is hope for the future. It means that the aboriginal young people of today can envision a future in which they are contributing members of society and play a proper role in society. That is what economic development means. It means self-respect. It means self-reliance. It means pride and all those things.

What does this government do? It cuts those budgets, which would help lead to that kind of an outcome, by 31 per cent.

At the same time the government saw fit, and probably saw it was necessary, to increase the welfare budget by 12 per cent, by \$52 million. The government says that it has

\$52 million for welfare but in order to pay that it must cut \$28 million in economic development.

I see that very phenomena in my own riding. I am not surprised. This year the government is spending \$170 million in one riding, most of it on aboriginal people, for welfare costs and income maintenance. The elders and these families will universally say that welfare has been the ruin of the aboriginal nation. The welfare system as we have developed it has helped to ruin family life and has helped to ruin self-sufficiency. It has taken away meaning in life. The elders are unanimous in their condemnation of the welfare system as we know it.

Yet, what does the minister do? The minister perpetuates the welfare system while at the same time cutting drastically, by 31 per cent, the mechanisms that could lead away from that welfare state.

• (1920)

When questioned about this earlier he said: Yes, it would be an ideal state of affairs if the aboriginal communities were in the position so that they could reallocate this money from spending on welfare to spending on meaningful work and meaningful economic activity which would build up the communities. He said it would be a wonderful thing if that were to happen.

I would like to remind the minister that he has it in his power to make that happen. Rather than creating a situation in which that is going to happen the minister has gone the other way and without consultation perpetuated the welfare system for aboriginal families and drastically cut back their ability to do anything about it.

It is indeed true that not only this government but past governments and we as a Canadian people have in many cases and in far too great a way abandoned aboriginal families—Indian, Métis and Inuit families.

I would like to conclude with the point that not only do those aboriginal families need the support, partnership and assistance of all of Canada, but we as Canadians need the contributions of those families.

Mr. Ross Reid (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I have found this debate today to be particularly interesting as it focuses on an issue that, through very sad events in the last number of weeks I have been forced, like all other Canadians, to come to grips with in real terms.