

*Government Orders*

• (1955)

**Mr. John Williams (St. Albert):** Mr. Speaker, congratulations again to the member for Souris—Moose Mountain on an excellent speech. I notice his real concern for the families and the young children of this nation. His concern is that there are so many families with single parents and the fact that their incomes are low.

He also mentioned that he thought perhaps the school system should be used to provide after school care for families that do not have a parent at home. There are a large number of families in this country with both parents working who do have a very high standard of living. It is their choice not to be there at home.

Is he suggesting that this nation again subsidize those people who can well afford to look after their children and provide that kind of care after school? Does he feel that we as a society are obligated to provide that to anybody who would like it just because the kids do not have someone at home when they get home?

**Mr. Collins:** Mr. Speaker, as an educator for over 31 years I had the opportunity to deal with the rich, the poor, the wise and those who were not so wise. I was happy to have them all. I say to the hon. member that if I knew of one youngster who needed my attention, rich or poor, I would want to be there as an educator, as a parent and as a citizen of this country.

The day we start elevating those who are rich and distinguishing between rich and poor, we are in a real problem state. I say to the hon. member that this is the problem in education. We have lost our commitment that we do have something to give these youngsters. If any one of them stayed away from problems because I looked after him, I would feel that is one thing I did to help him along the way in life. I see no problem there. I want us to have those opportunities for them.

[Translation]

**Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis):** Mr. Speaker, as the education and youth critic for the Official Opposition, I wanted to take the opportunity afforded by this debate on social programs to draw the attention of hon. members to the alarming situation prevailing among young people in Canada and in Quebec.

In Canada, to recall a few statistics, 17.5 per cent of young Canadians between the ages of 18 and 24 are now unemployed, which means more than 600,000 young people; 30 per cent do not finish high school; 51 per cent of high school graduates earn less than \$10,000; and only 11 per cent earn over \$20,000. More than two million young people are living in poverty. Furthermore, 12 per cent have serious drug problems.

Since the government has often said it wanted to give Canadians and Quebecers renewed hope and dignity, it will have to do something about these alarming statistics. After all, our young people are our future, are they not?

Another disturbing phenomenon is the increase in violence and intolerance among young people. According to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, the number of young people accused of violent crime has increased by an average of 14 per cent annually since 1986. Considering the problems we mentioned earlier, this should come as no surprise.

In the past weeks, a number of members raised the issue of stricter treatment of young offenders. I agree it is necessary to send a clear message to young criminals. Their crimes should not go unpunished, but we believe it is absolutely essential to examine the social context that breeds violence and intolerance among young people.

Second, I would like to talk about the situation of young people in Quebec which is even more alarming and distressing. According to a recent report by the Conseil permanent de la jeunesse du Québec, nearly 40 per cent of young Quebecers live in poverty and 50 per cent do so for at least five years. More than 150,000 young Quebecers are on welfare.

• (2000)

The Quebec coroner's office has recorded an average of some 350 suicides by young people every year since 1987. The youth unemployment rate in Quebec is nearly 20 per cent, or over 137,000 young people just in Quebec. At least 45,000 jobs would have to be created annually in Quebec to absorb the young people arriving on the labour market. The high-school dropout rate is now 32.2 per cent in Quebec.

Vocational training is also deficient. Most of the 26,000 people waiting for training to improve their chances on the labour market are young.

The alarming situation of young people affects not only their own future prospects but also the economy. More and more, young people must face the same prejudices as all unemployed people and welfare recipients. The confidence and dignity of our rising generation suffer greatly as a result. The vicious circle of unemployment and poverty—I realize that this does not seem to interest the people opposite, but I would not like us to be drowned out by their laughter and their talking. They are disturbing us.

It is not easy to get out of the vicious circle of unemployment and poverty. It leads to an extreme loss of motivation which can increase the social problems of our young people. The situation of young native people is even more alarming and requires more specific help that is better suited to what they are going through.

In the speech from the throne, the government said that it was considering self-government for native people. It could start by