

Adjournment Debate

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): The hon. member for Carleton-Charlotte (Mr. McCain).

Mr. McCain: Madam Speaker, I presume you will want to call it ten o'clock at this time.

● (2200)

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

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

INDIAN AFFAIRS—ALLEGED FAILURE OF MINISTER TO DEAL WITH GRIEVANCES OF TREATY SEVEN CHIEFS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): On April 15, as reported at page 4813 of *Hansard*, as one of a series of questions addressed to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Buchanan), I asked why the minister had not responded to a single major suggestion or request put forward by the Treaty 7 Chiefs of Bands and whether he intended to continue to ignore their legitimate grievances and concerns, or go back and deal with them directly.

The minister responded:

Mr. Speaker, the statement is absolutely incorrect.

On November 28, 1974, treaty Indians from throughout Southern Alberta occupied the offices in Calgary of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. They did so to protest inadequate services provided to Indians living in the City of Calgary. It was done as an act of frustration after everything else had failed. The Government of Canada had pulled back on a major commitment to assist the urban Indians of Calgary to begin to develop programs which would help them meet the special and peculiar problems of native Canadians living in a modern metropolitan centre. A commitment had been made to help them, but the government turned its back on its own commitment.

Out of frustration, the occupation took place. This led to the Minister of Indian Affairs laying criminal charges against two of the native people involved. Unfortunately the question of the laying of criminal charges became the focus of attention arising out of the incident, and it has taken attention away from what are the major issues—first, the bad relations between the Indian people and the public servants who are in Alberta to try to serve them; second, growing evidence that economic development and social assistance programs for status Indian are not working and need improvement.

Finally, and most important, is the fact that urban Indians, treaty Indians living in cities, now find themselves in limbo without either the provincial or the federal government assuming responsibility for helping them meet the special difficulties of adjustment they must solve.

[The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin).]

After the charges were laid several respected chiefs of tribes in the Treaty 7 region submitted detailed proposals to the Minister of Indian Affairs asking for a change in various programs and in certain personnel. They sought a meeting with the minister. On April 7 the minister replied by meeting with the Treaty 7 chiefs, buying them a steak dinner in a hotel in Banff and, as the meeting ended, by handing them sealed envelopes which contained his response to their recent proposals. There are hardly words to describe the disappointment which was felt when the chiefs opened those envelopes and found that the minister had declined to respond to the suggestions they had made. I would like to quote from a respected spokesman for the Blackfoot Band, Chief Leo Pretty Young Man, who said:

We are dismayed by the lack of thought and interest displayed in the minister's return to us. We raised new concepts and ideas—We got back a letter which describes present programs and refers us to existing staff. It wasn't much of an answer.

Chief John Snow, respected chief of the Stoneys, called the minister's response, and I quote: "irrelevant, meaningless and unbelievable," adding, "Our problems began with the district office and now the minister has referred us back to them."

This indicates the severity of the problem which exists in Alberta with regard to Treaty 7 Indians both on the reserves and in the city centres. The minister's response to my question indicates that either he does not appreciate the seriousness of the problem or else he refuses to respond to it.

The question of treaty Indians living in urban areas is a major and menacing new social problem for Western Canada. It affects all the major cities of the prairies. The incident discussed here happened to occur in Calgary, but it could have occurred in Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, or Winnipeg. It is complicated by the fact that no government, federal, provincial, or local, has addressed itself to the problem. No government in Canada has a right to feel proud of its response to the new and menacing situation of treaty Indians trying to live in urban areas.

What makes the problem more dangerous is that a climate of hostility toward our native Indians is developing across the country. It has not become large scale yet, but it is developing. We have militancy among our native people in response. It is not enough, in face of this problem, simply to lay criminal charges and deny that the problem exists. There has been—I will admit this to the minister and his representative—some very good work done on economic development and other things, but most of this has been done in-house without the involvement of the people most directly affected.

What is most critical, and what I wish to draw to the attention of the House of Commons tonight, is the fact that no attention is being given to the serious and growing problems created by the movement of more and more status Indians into urban areas that they are not equipped to live in, and which are not equipped to respond to them. This is a social problem of already serious proportions, with a capacity to grow. It is a problem that is occurring not in any one province or region but all across Canada.

What is required is a national response, and I raise this matter tonight to ask the representatives of the Government of Canada when they are going to start realizing the