

*Incarceration of Native Persons*

justice critic, I am the spokesman for the Progressive Conservative Party on Indian Affairs and Northern Development. I felt it incumbent upon me to address the motion which is before us today. I congratulate the Hon. Member for bringing this forward, but I am concerned that both she and the Government are again talking about band-aid approaches to a much larger problem. It is a problem which we do not have the opportunity to talk about very often in the House. It is a major, if not the major, social problem which we are experiencing in our country today.

The Hon. Member alluded to a number of statistics. I would be interested in finding out exactly when those statistics were published. I have found it most difficult to obtain up-to-date statistics. In fact, the latest statistics which I have been able to obtain are already seven years out of date. The last statistics which I have been able to obtain were published in 1977. However, the report, which was nick-named the Penner report—the official name of that report is: *Indian Self-Government in Canada: Report of the Special Committee*—has listed some startling statistics about which we should be concerned and which are pertinent to this debate. I do not think that we can overlook those startling statistics when talking about the justice system and the 280 Indians per 100,000 population who are penitentiary inmates as compared with the national figure of 40 penitentiary inmates per 100,000 population. We must ask ourselves as a society: Why is the number so high?

The Hon. Member for Broadview-Greenwood (Ms. McDonald) alludes to the reason and says that it is an indictment of our criminal justice system. I would say that it goes far beyond that. In fact, it is not only the criminal justice system which is at fault; it is the society in which our aboriginal people find themselves. I think it is very important to outline some of these facts. For example, let us consider child welfare. The proportion of Indian children in care has risen steadily to more than five times the national rate. In education, only 20 per cent of Indian children stay in school to the end of the secondary level. The comparable national rate is 75 per cent. When we talk about housing, nearly 19 per cent of on-reserve homes have two or more families living in them. These conditions affect 40 per cent of all status Indian families. We can talk about facilities. Again we must go back to 1977, and I condemn the Government for not having more up-to-date statistics and information on this very important social problem. It is ridiculous that we have to work on statistics which are seven years old. However, in 1977, fewer than 40 per cent of Indian houses had running water, sewage disposal or indoor plumbing facilities. The national level of properly serviced housing is well over 90 per cent. The average income of Indian people is one-half to two-thirds of the national average. Their unemployment rate is about 35 per cent of the working age population. In some areas it is as high as 90 per cent unemployment. Despite improvements over the last ten years, the death rate among Indian people is two to four times the death rate of non-Indians. Causes of death from accidents, poisoning and violence account for over 33 per cent of the death among

Indian people, compared with 9 per cent for the Canadian population as a whole. Indian people die from fire at a rate which is seven times that for the rest of the Canadian population. That speaks to the condition under which they have to live. The over-all rate of violent deaths among Indian people is more than three times the national average. Indian deaths due to suicide is almost three times the national rate. Suicide is especially prevalent among the age group of 15 years to 24 years. That says an awful lot in itself, that one statistic.

● (1740)

The infant mortality rate among Indian children is 60 per cent higher than the national rate. The life expectancy is much lower. The number of hospital admissions are much greater. And to get back to the problem which is being addressed in this motion today, native people are over-represented in proportion to their population in federal and provincial penitentiaries. In Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the north, native people represent more than 40 per cent of the prison population. The proportion of Indian juveniles who are considered delinquent is three times the national average. That is a pretty sorry and bleak picture I paint today of the position in which our aboriginal people find themselves. Because of those social conditions, I believe it is clear to anyone who would take a look at those statistics that in fact turning to crime is something which many native people, I suppose out of necessity in many cases, engage in. Therefore, to just condemn our criminal justice system and to suggest improvements to the criminal justice system—and heaven knows we need them. And I agree with the Hon. Member for Broadview-Greenwood on that matter. It is not enough. I just do not believe it can be addressed in isolation. I believe we have to look at the much broader picture.

Why are our aboriginal people involved to such a great extent in crime and charges which involve incarceration? Something at which I did take a look was the major offences, just to make the comparison between native and non-native people. It is interesting to note that, in violent offences, our native people have a higher percentage than non-natives. However, the rate of offences against property is higher for non-native than for native people. The rate of offences against the Narcotic Control Act and the Food and Drugs Act is much higher for non-native than it is for native people. In other offences the rate is approximately the same.

With respect to the sentences to federal penitentiaries—and again the statistics are seven and eight years old, which is very frustrating—the number of less than two-year sentences is greater for native than for non-native people. However, the number of sentences over three years, on a percentage basis, is higher for native than for non-native people. The juvenile delinquency rate, as I mentioned earlier, is three times the national average. I suppose that when we look at these statistics we have to admit that the high Indian representation in our jails suggests there is a conflict between Indian and non-Indian values.