

Manpower and Immigration Council

and 2,000 Indians in Manitoba who were able to take courses under the old Program Five. The courses they took may not have been of much use in terms of getting jobs in the cities of Canada, but they were a great deal of use for Indians working in and around their reservations. There were courses last year on how to build houses, a very important one on Indian reserves. There were handicraft courses and courses in agriculture. All these courses under the old Program Five which, as the minister knows, was administered by the provinces although paid for by the federal government, were available and, as I said, there were 1,800 to 2,000 Indians who qualified and took these courses before the federal department of manpower took over the retraining programs. This year, which is only in its seventh month, the number of Indians who have taken courses and who will begin the courses which have been approved is less than 200. Even if one assumed that the year started very slowly because this is a new department, and even if one tripled that number for the five remaining months of the year, the number of Indians who will qualify for retraining courses in Manitoba in the coming year will be not more than a third of the number who qualified for these courses last year.

I want to say to the minister—and I do not say this in a critical sense—that I think the minister will agree with me that there is no group of people in Canada who need the opportunity of education and of manpower training courses more than our Indians. The department of Indian affairs has done a tremendous job in upgrading the education of Indians in recent years, although perhaps not as much as some of us would have liked, and I am sure not as much as the officials of the department would have liked. But the fact is that they still have a long way to go and I think it is a tragedy that what was a promising program last year has now virtually come to a halt.

I asked the minister a question about this during the question period today and he told me it is not true that the educational standards the department requires now before people can qualify for retraining courses are higher than they were previously, before the department operated the manpower retraining courses. If that is his answer, then I wish he would communicate his policy to the field officers in the locality. I have been told, and as I say this information came to me today from officials in the Indian affairs department, that the reason for this drop is that the

councillors working for the manpower department have pretty well adopted the policy that if a person does not have a grade 8 education, or the equivalent, he is not eligible to enter one of the manpower retraining courses. The fact is of course that there are a number of Indians, particularly those who are in their thirties and forties, who do not have more than a grade 6 education or its equivalent. It is for this reason, to a very large extent, there has been this substantial drop of which I have been speaking tonight.

• (9:50 p.m.)

I understand that the deputy minister held a meeting in Winnipeg with the various officials and said that, in his opinion, the manpower training courses were available for any person who was willing to work. However, the manpower councillors in Manitoba have repeatedly, particularly in isolated areas where the Indians live, questioned the Indians on whether they have applied for work. The Indians have said; No, we have not applied for work. They meant they had not applied for work because there would be no point in applying for work in those areas, since there has not been any work available. These Indians therefore have been turned down when they have applied for permission to qualify for the manpower retraining courses.

I have heard stories to the effect that when 40 or 50 Indians have applied for permission to take courses, these councillors have only approved three or four applications. I want to say to the minister that I find this a very disturbing situation. I do not expect the minister to be able to give answers tonight, but this situation is one he should look at very carefully, and if the facts which have been recounted to me by the officials of the Indian affairs branch are true, then a good deal more co-operation and consultation is needed between the two federal departments. I consider this to be a retrograde step and I hope that the number of Indians taking the training courses will be increased in the very near future.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I regret I have only a few minutes left to answer all questions that have been asked.

Since I consider it urgent that the bill before us should become law, I shall answer briefly the main questions, even if I have to

[Mr. Orlikow.]