

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

I am reminded of the personal contact the Prime Minister had during the last election campaign with the opposite sex. There is supposed to be a student council but the student council is composed of five members, three of whom are appointed by the superintendent and supervisory staff. One member is responsible for the boys and the other is responsible for the girls. When an attempt was made to set up a proper student council everyone concerned with the attempt was intimidated and coerced in a terrible way. I have in my possession also the report by a volunteer of the Company of Young Canadians which sets out all the details together with examples of dismissals, expulsions, coercion and discipline for infractions of incredibly harsh and stupid rules.

The other day the minister referred to the fact that he received a wire. I suggested it was the same wire I had received. I knew it must have been, and of course it was. That wire said, in effect, "We thank you for trying but think we can settle our own problems". The fact is that the proposal to send that wire was defeated by the students at two meetings in the noon hour and in the afternoon in the cafeteria, but the superintendent sent it nevertheless. I know the minister has received a second wire which the students signed. About ten of them signed both wires. This is the usual result of intimidation, as I have found in long practice in labour relations.

The second wire is addressed to me. It reads:

We thank you for your concern and would like to ask you to investigate the situation at Akaitcho Hall. Could you send someone to us to get the real impression of our unique problems here. We hope you are with us.

Then, these students tell us about the first wire. I have in my possession a letter from one of the residents of the hall. It is from a 20 year old girl who says she is still treated as a child. In the letter there is this sentence:

We desperately need help and will be most grateful for any that we may receive.

If I had more than seven minutes, there are literally dozens more incidents and instances I could cite. I wish to use my last minute or two to tell the minister, who is courteous enough to be here this evening, that the responsibility rests with him and his department. It may not be his entirely because he has headed this department for only seven, eight or nine months and these regulations date back to at least 1964.

[Mr. Lewis.]

The responsibility for this situation, however, does lie with his department. If the departmental officers did not know this was happening, they are a bunch of incompetents who ought to be fired tomorrow. If they did know what was happening and did nothing about it, they are a bunch of sadists who ought to be sent to a psychiatrist instead of being responsible for the education of the men and women who are native citizens of this country.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I have come to the house this evening to answer the hon. member.

I think that the terms he used were a little exaggerated and I feel that the situation is not as bad as he suggested. It is a quite delicate situation and as soon as I was told about the problem, I asked the authorities of the Territory to conduct an inquiry. Now as I have full confidence in people who have acquired some experience in labour relations—like the hon. member for York South—I have asked the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, Mr. Hodgson, a former labour leader, to deal with the situation himself and to see to it that any abuse is corrected.

Evidently, we must take into account that in the house of commons, we are always told, that the people in the North should make their own decisions and enjoy self-determination.

That is a local problem. The situation had not been reported to the local authorities, but only to Ottawa. I asked the commissioner to investigate and have consultations with all interested parties, mainly the authorities responsible for keeping order in the institution. The hon. member will appreciate that it is necessary to have certain internal rules in order that an institution can work and that be protected the interests of the parents who send their children, for when boys and girls of different age groups attend an institution such as this, one must realize that some to be very sensitive about the situation.

Furthermore, there are in those institutions persons with a different background and of different ethnical origin, and it is necessary to be very sensitive about the situation.

One must also consider the interests of the students who attend those institutions. I think we should consult them in that regard. Naturally, rules are perhaps a little too strict, and for this reason I asked the commissioner to examine the problem. I know that the regulations are being revised.