

● (1425)

**Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport):** My information is that the problem is not one of cost but of availability, so in this instance the Minister of State for the Wheat Board moved at the request of the livestock feeders to make sure that the feed barley would be available. I have not heard that this is a financial matter; I have heard the situation described as one of increasing the quantities on the market.

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### INDIAN AFFAIRS

#### STEPS TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS ON RESERVES

**Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa):** Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Over the weekend, the hon. gentleman's department issued yet another report on the condition of Canada's Indians, which is deeply disturbing. It reveals that in almost every aspect of life, whether we are talking about housing, educational opportunities, violence or health conditions, Canada's Indians live in a state which can only be described in general terms as deplorable.

Since the hon. gentleman's party has governed Canada almost non-stop since 1963—

**Mr. Hnatyshyn:** With your help.

**Mr. Broadbent:** —I should like to ask him when it intends to come to grips with its responsibility for Canada's original inhabitants.

**Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Madam Speaker, I hope we can come to grips with it as quickly as possible. It is a disturbing report, there is no doubt about that. The fact of the matter is we have initiated an improvement in housing policy, we are getting the co-operation of DREE and we are also getting assistance from employment programs.

As the Leader of the New Democratic Party may remember, my colleague the Minister of Employment and Immigration announced that increased funding would be targeted to native groups. In addition, we are meeting with the Indian community with respect to increased funding for self-government, hoping to come forward with legislation in that regard perhaps in the fall. This could deal with one of the underlying causes of which many of the other items are symptoms.

We are giving our utmost attention to a mix of policies of this kind as a means of coping with a situation which is an unhappy one; there is no question about it. It may be small consolation but I would point out that the report did say that conditions, bad as they are, have improved over the last two decades.

**Mr. Broadbent:** Madam Speaker, I do not think anyone in this House can take any pride in the statement that conditions have improved for Canada's Indians, when 30 per cent die

### Oral Questions

through violent means, a percentage which I suspect is higher than before the white man appeared on this continent, and when 50 per cent of the homes are without water.

In this context I would like to ask the minister: since the proportion of the funds allocated to social programs by this government has actually declined in the last ten years, contrary to what he implied in his answer, will he make a commitment this afternoon that the amount set aside in his budget for Canada's Indians will be substantially increased?

**Mr. Munro (Hamilton East):** I have already indicated that the government has under active consideration, right now, substantial increases in funding for houses which will be incremental, over and above the present commitment to all our programs. This report will undeniably have some impact on the thinking of the government and we shall certainly be looking into the areas to which the hon. member has drawn attention.

**Mr. Broadbent:** The House knows very well there is a distinction between the government considering something and the government committing itself to doing something. What we are calling for is action, not just thinking about the problem. In this context, the government has appointed a number of special commissions which have made sense, and obtained the support of all parties to deal with aspects of other problems in Canada.

● (1430)

I would like to ask the minister if the government will appoint, now, a special commission on Canada's Indians—which would have a deadline; it would terminate with the calling back of Parliament in the fall—to study past reports and to come back to Parliament in the fall with specific recommendations which should be acted upon before Christmas.

**Mr. Munro (Hamilton East):** Madam Speaker, the Leader of the New Democratic Party is suggesting a special type of legislative body to look into this question. I am prepared to consider it. I will say right now that we will give it consideration, but I point out to the Leader of the New Democratic Party that there is a standing committee of the House—one of the most active standing committees that we have—dealing with Indian questions.

That committee has been meeting regularly over the last several weeks. The hearings have been going on and a good deal of evidence has been received. All parties are participating. It could be an example of one of the most effective standing committees that we have. That standing committee has all the latitude it wishes in terms of going into this report and requesting further information.

I might say that the National Indian Brotherhood and others are in the audience. They are equipped to brief both New Democratic Party members of the committee and official opposition members. Again I suggest that the Leader of the New Democratic Party might take a hard look at the standing