

Oral Questions

very graphic terms the incredible and unconscionable inhuman conditions and degradation our Indian people are suffering throughout the country.

Is the minister in a position today to enlighten the House as to what new initiatives he, his department and government are undertaking to respond to this incredible and unbelievable report?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): I am sorry—

Madam Speaker: Perhaps the hon. member would like to direct his question to another minister.

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): I wonder if the hon. member would please repeat his question.

Mr. Oberle: Madam Speaker, I do not want to be unkind to the minister. I hope he pays a little more attention to the report that my question makes reference to than he is to what is going on in the House.

My question is: since the minister has now had a few days since tabling the report entitled "Indian Conditions", can he tell the House today what he, his department and government are undertaking? What new initiatives are they undertaking to correct some of these incredible and unconscionable situations of human degradation under which our Indian people are living?

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): Madam Speaker, I remind the hon. member that last week I answered an almost identical question from the previous minister of Indian affairs on this side of the House. I said at that time that we planned to bring in legislation in the fall, hopefully, that would set out a formula for the Indians, at their own option, to opt for Indian government to take over many of the responsibilities now being performed by the bureaucracy, which has contributed to a very high degree of debilitating dependence by Indian communities on the government and which has contributed to the poverty situation. That has been the feeling as expressed in the Beaver report and other studies undertaken by the Indian communities themselves. That seems to get to the root cause, rather than dealing with symptoms.

With regard to some of the other disturbing implications in the report to which the hon. member referred, there are proposals before the government now for increased expenditures in housing, which admittedly is in a sorry state: much more housing is required. I hope there will shortly be a decision with respect to the availability or otherwise of the funds. Certainly, if we get on with these measures, particularly the legislation in the fall, with the support of all opposition parties, we will go a long way to improving a situation that admittedly is very disturbing.

Mr. Oberle: Madam Speaker, it is not very often that a minister stands in the House and lays all the blame for the failures of his government on the bureaucracy and the department which he administers. The buck must stop some place.

I would like to ask the minister, since he does listen to the so-called, self-styled champion of Indian affairs who was the minister and did not do anything either, would he respond to a request by that hon. member and a request by myself in the standing committee to issue a special reference and provide the Indian Affairs committee with some kind of special status to give that committee the power and jurisdiction to travel around the country, write a report and make recommendations? Having received such recommendations, would he then relieve the country of this national disgrace?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): It is very unfortunate, to the knowledge of every member of the House including opposition members, that the hon. member would choose in his comments, unless he did not listen to my answer at all, to intentionally misrepresent my answer.

Mr. Oberle: You said the bureaucracy is at fault; that is what you said.

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): I did not say that.

Mr. Oberle: You are at fault.

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): The blues will indicate, and *Hansard* tomorrow will clearly indicate what I did say, and I did not say that. What I did say was that if the Indian community took over functions that are now being performed by the bureaucracy—and, as the hon. member knows, this is an obligation on the bureaucracy under the Indian Act—and if we changed the Indian Act so that the bureaucracy would not have to perform these functions for the Indians, then the Indians would not be in a self-dependence state which is such a contributor to the problem. This point was made in the Beaver report. That certainly is not criticizing the bureaucracy, unless the hon. member totally lacks any comprehension of the problem.

With regard to the hon. member's reference to my predecessor in this portfolio, if he has any doubts all he need do is talk to any of the Indian leaders across this country: they will tell him some of the real accomplishments that minister made when he occupied this position.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): If I may finish, Madam Speaker, in a more constructive vein—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.