

*Adjournment Debate*

INDIAN AFFAIRS—ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FOR NATIVES IN URBAN CENTRES. (B) ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North):** Mr. Speaker, last week when the press carried a report that a task force appointed by the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Nielsen) had recommended that funding for native programs be cut by \$169 million there was, of course, an immediate attack on that proposal from native organizations and Members of Parliament. Many questions asked about this proposal. The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Crombie) made it very clear that the proposal of the task force would not become part of the Government's policy.

Recently we have had a good deal of discussion and reporting in the media about the problems of native people. Most recently, however, the discussion has been about the issue of Indian self-government and aboriginal land rights, with less discussion about the abysmal conditions under which most of the native people in Canada live. It was reported in a survey done a few years ago that conditions on most of Canada's reserves were truly disheartening. The report referred to poor housing, inadequate education, and sub-standard health care. Unemployment on the reserves is a high as 80 per cent. Sixty per cent of the people on reserves live in homes without running water, and life expectancy is 10 years less than the national average. Perhaps the saddest and most revealing statistic of all is that the suicide rate among young people on reserves is six times that of other Canadians.

That kind of information is well known to many Canadians. What is less well known is the very serious plight of the native people who have been living in and are now moving, in increasing numbers, to the cities. A study done a couple of years ago reported that there were 15,000 to 20,000 native people living in my city of Winnipeg, 10,000 to 15,000 living in Edmonton, 5,000 to 10,000 in Calgary, 15,000 to 20,000 in Vancouver, and 15,000 living in Regina. The plight of native people living in those and other cities is truly alarming.

It has been estimated that in my own City of Winnipeg, 50 per cent of all the child welfare cases come from the native community. A high percentage of the people on welfare in the City of Winnipeg are native. Close to 50 per cent of the inmates in western Canadian prisons and jails are Native. In six schools in the core area of my City of Winnipeg, 50 per cent to 80 per cent of the students are Native people and many of them have a very limited knowledge of the English language. Those problems have been ignored to a large extent by federal Governments, both Liberal and Conservative, because they have taken the position that federal Government's legal responsibility is to Native people living on reserves, and once those people leave those reserves to go to the cities they are no longer the legal responsibility of the federal Government. As I have indicated, the plight of Native people living in the cities is close to a disaster.

● (1825)

Some good things have recently been accomplished in my province. The Children's Aid Society has been dissolved and Child Welfare Service has been reorganized so that there are now smaller regional agencies which give representation to Native peoples in the areas in which they live. We are beginning to get Native social workers who have been trained in our universities and community colleges and in special programs established for Native people. In Manitoba there are more than 500 Native teachers who have graduated, having received their training in special Native teaching training programs that were funded jointly by the Federal and provincial Governments.

There are special employment training programs in Winnipeg in the Core Area Development Program, a program funded by the federal, provincial and municipal governments. Recently, the Secretary of State sponsored a national conference on Native women in business in Winnipeg. In Winnipeg we have KNEW Housing, an organization operated by Native people using funds supplied by the federal Government. It purchased homes, remodels and refurbishes them and rents them to Native people who live in the City of Winnipeg.

Improvements have been made but a great deal needs to be done. I am pleased that the Minister says he has an advisory committee to look at these problems, but I call on him and the Government to do a great deal more than they have done to deal with this very serious problem.

**Mr. Girve Fretz (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Mr. Speaker, I want to speak to the issue raised by the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) concerning Indians living off reserves, especially in urban areas. Indeed, he has raised a question that concerns all of us.

As the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Crombie) indicated in the House last Thursday, there is consultation under way to review key concerns regarding Indian people living off reserves. The Minister recognizes the seriousness of the problem and already has taken initiatives on this matter which has been left uncertain because of overlapping responsibilities between the various levels of Government. He has already met with the mayors of a number of major municipalities including Vancouver, Winnipeg and Toronto, and has indicated that a solution to the plight of many off reserve Indians must and will be found.

The seriousness of the problem should not be underestimated. The percentage of status Indians living off reserves doubled between the years 1966 and 1976 and has increased by a further 30 per cent since then. A large portion of these people tend to be unskilled and poor. Many move to the cities to seek better employment opportunities only to find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and mounting social problems. In turn, this situation places increasing strains on the relationship between Natives and non Natives in these communities.