

I want to refer to two predecessors of mine in this chamber who were status Indians. Senator Gladstone was appointed to this house on January 31, 1958. He was an esteemed senator, who hailed from Cardston, Alberta. He made his maiden speech in this chamber on August 13, 1958. On that occasion he moved second reading of a bill which amended the Indian Act, Bill C-24. I did not in my research find out the exact nature of that bill, because he did not refer to it in any detail. However, I knew Senator Gladstone well. He was a gentleman, and I believe he conducted himself in this chamber with honour on behalf of his people. I know that was his desire.

Senator Williams, whom many of you know, was appointed to this house on December 9, 1971. Senator Williams is from the province of British Columbia. He is a long-time friend of mine. He also conducted himself with distinction and honour in this chamber. Incidentally, recently Senator Williams has not been well, and I am sure that all honourable senators will join with me in wishing him a speedy recovery, and we hope that he will regain good health for the future.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Marchand: I am a member of the Okanagan Indian Band, near Vernon, British Columbia. To me, that has always been a great source of pride during my life as a member of Parliament in the other place. I want to say that I look forward to my participation in the work of this house, and I hope that I conduct myself in the same manner as my two predecessors as Indians in this chamber. It is an honour for me to be here with so many distinguished and capable men and women as senators.

I suppose one of the aspects of this bill that we are dealing with tonight relates to self-government, the government of the Indian people, the First Nation, or however you want to describe us. Just as an aside, let me say that I read some portions of the late Honourable John Diefenbaker's book, the first volume, in which he commented upon why he appointed Senator Gladstone to this chamber back in 1958. He said that at that time it was his desire to see a greater participation of the Indian people of this land in the political, economic and social life of this country. At that time he felt that there was no other way in which to accomplish that other than appointing Senator Gladstone to this chamber. However, he later went on to refer, very kindly, to my election, and also the election of Wally Firth at the time, who was a Métis from the Northwest Territories, as things that happened perhaps a little sooner than he thought would be the case.

Perhaps another significant thing that happened around that time was that the Indians of Canada received the federal vote for the first time in this land of ours in 1960. It was the first time that they received that vote.

I will refer to some other very significant things that happened, because some of the changes that are now in this bill relate to Indians receiving the vote. One of the clauses refers to enfranchisement. I know of people who gave up status as Indians when they were so-called enfranchised under the Indian Act, just so that they could get the vote and so that

[Senator Marchand.]

they could buy things like liquor. In the province of British Columbia, for instance, we were not able to go and buy liquor legally in the liquor stores until 1960. It caused our people a great deal of pain and hurt later on, because right now alcoholism among our people is one of the most serious problems they face. Be that as it may, we were still discriminated against very seriously in so many laws of this land. I will never forget that before 1960, when I was 21, I went to the liquor store to buy my first bottle of booze ever. Every time I think about it I shake. I stood in line at the liquor store on West Broadway in Vancouver and so many thoughts went through my mind. I wondered if at some point somebody was going to say, "Hey, you, Indian, get out. You can't come in here. You're Indian. You can't come in and buy liquor." Those are the realities of the situation that we had to face. I am glad that there is at least some movement toward addressing some of those issues in this bill.

● (2130)

I am very pleased with the comments that Senator Fairbairn made. She covered a lot of the territory I wanted to cover this evening. She made an excellent speech. She covered in a very sensitive manner a lot of the real issues that are before the people and are being dealt with in this bill. In introducing this bill, Senator Nurgitz referred to it as a historic act. I wish I could be in agreement with all of his points because I know he sincerely wants to do the right thing, as do other honourable senators. But in terms of fundamental justice and equality of treatment for Indian women, this bill is defective. It really is quite a good bill for the future but for now it fails that test of equality for women badly. I acknowledge that it is okay for those women who can come back, numbering 16,000, and it is also okay for the other 2,000 who lost membership and status for various other reasons. Good God, can you imagine losing your band membership and status because you get a university degree? Can you imagine losing your status as an Indian because you joined the army? Can you imagine the women losing their status because they marry a non-Indian? I can only say about those circumstances, "How stupid could we have been to put up with all of those kinds of situations?"

The bill discriminates against women in this manner: It splits families, which is a very serious matter. The women can come back but all of their descendants cannot come back into band membership and status. The only reason those women and all of their descendants lost membership or did not have membership in the beginning is because they are women and because those descendants were descendants of women. An Indian male was always able to pass on status to any number of generations because he was male. This bill fails badly on that count. It is a very serious matter and a very serious situation in terms of fundamental justice and equality and of treatment for Indian women.

I hope that in the consideration of this bill in committee we can make amendments and present them to the minister again. I am really sorry if the women have to suffer again and resort to the courts in order to obtain justice. They have suffered great indignities, particularly the indignity of losing their