

*Adjournment Debate*

governments, to finally pay attention to the demands of aboriginal peoples for constitutional justice and respect.

On the weekend, the British Columbia Provincial Council of the New Democratic Party passed a motion announcing its full support for Manitoba native leader and New Democrat MLA, Elijah Harper, in his efforts to ensure that aboriginal people achieve full constitutional recognition. As the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs stated in their presentation before the Charest committee: "The Meech Lake Accord distorts historical reality in Canada by not affirming that aboriginal peoples are distinct societies that also constitute a fundamental characteristic of Canada."

• (1940)

We did not listen to the aboriginal peoples when they appeared before our committee. For example, Gary Gold from the New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples' Council said: "We are being completely shut out of the process of consultations. We were promised by the federal government only three months ago that we would be consulted fully."

Ron George from British Columbia said: "We have shown good faith by developing the idea of a companion resolution approach. We must not be excluded from the process once again." They were excluded from the process. Northerners were betrayed. The north has a substantial aboriginal population. Once again, the process of constitutional change in Canada has left aboriginal peoples behind.

We could have done it right. We could have said "yes" to Quebec and said "yes" to aboriginal peoples. Indeed, aboriginal peoples have made it very clear that they share the concern about closing the circle of Confederation to include Quebec. In an open letter sent by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs to the premier of Quebec, they stated that:

Historically, the Aboriginal people in Canada and French speaking people have had close ties.

We want to make it very clear that we have chosen to oppose the passage of the—Accord: not to deny your position as a distinct society but to defend our right and to protest the lack of recognition of Canada's First Nations.

In closing, I want to quote briefly from the words of National Chief George Erasmus who said:

We are tired of explaining to our children why we must continue to wait for a new dawn in white-Indian relations before we are treated with dignity and respect in our own land. We do not want to wait for our turn. When we wait, our turn never comes.

It is time for this government and for all governments to recognize that aboriginal peoples have been left out of the process, that their concerns must be addressed not in some distant future but now, and that they must be involved. If there is to be an extension of the deadline, they must be involved in the new process of constitutional change to ensure that they are there at the table when those concerns are being raised. It must be ensured that they are at the table, as my Leader and I called last week, at the First Minister's Conference in December.

Justice demands that we listen to the voice of Elijah Harper and of all aboriginal peoples and that we not once again betray them in the process of constitutional change.

**Mrs. Dorothy Dobbie (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Madam Speaker, in spite of the political rhetoric that we hear so often delivered in this House, I am sure that the hon. member has the same interest that all Canadians have, that is to keep this country together so that we can, together, address the concerns of the aboriginal peoples and others.

In that spirit, today the Prime Minister wrote to Chief Fontaine, the provincial leader of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs in Manitoba, to respond to the concerns raised by him about the Meech Lake Accord and the Constitutional Amendment, the companion amendment.

In his letter, the Prime Minister made six commitments. First, he stated that he intends to invite representatives of aboriginal peoples of Canada to participate in any future First Ministers' Conference where there is discussion about the recognition of aboriginal peoples, the so-called recognition clause.

Moreover, the Government of Canada is committed to recognizing the aboriginal peoples as a fundamental characteristic of Canada in the Constitution. As hon. members are aware, the companion constitutional resolution agreed to by the First Ministers at the June 9 meeting would reinstate the process of First Ministers' Conferences on matters of interest to the aboriginal people of the country.