

Government Orders

I believe that the question of race, race prejudice, racial oppression, racial injustice, is a very serious matter, much overlooked by many of my fellow Canadians and, in fact, one that I did not take as seriously in some past years as I now wish I had because problems that I thought were going away appear to be dreadfully still with us.

Therefore, I think we have to ask ourselves seriously if this bill is for real, is this department proposal for real? Or is it just patronage jobs and top-down propaganda? That is to say, is it really going to focus on opposing, combating and reducing racial discrimination and ethnic discrimination, and if so, how?

One very practical proposal put forward by the New Democrats was that there should be an ombudsman or commissioner, someone who would have statutorily defined duties and powers to whom anyone who felt aggrieved could appeal. Well, that was turned down and it is now sort of mushy, wishy-washy, in a department with a lot of friendly rhetoric but no clear undertaking.

That is not good enough because we have to face the fact that is with us to this very day that Canada as we conventionally call it has racism in its foundation. Canada was self-defined among the French and English arrivals from Europe who chose to kill and dispossess the First Nations of this country and to restrict them to very, very limited ways of earning a living. That is there and that has not changed to this day, not fundamentally.

Now, it is good to be busy about correcting some of the racial wrongs that have been done since then. It is good to correct the matter of the blacks in Canada who have been with us for centuries and are still discriminated against. It is good to correct the matter of the Japanese-Canadians, the matter of the Sikhs, the matter of the Chinese railway workers. When I attended this unveiling of the monument to the Chinese railroad workers that the previous speaker spoke of, I also felt great satisfaction since the idea had been initiated by my motion in Toronto city council in 1979. Certainly more of that is needed and perhaps there should be a monument in Vancouver, if there is not one already.

Ms. Mitchell: There is already.

Mr. Heap: I hear there is already. That is good. But it was appropriate to have it in Toronto where so many of the descendants of the Chinese railway workers are established now.

• (1310)

After founding Canada in part on the dispossession of its First Nations, the aboriginal people have been mistreated from then until now, including through our constitution. Our constitution, when asked to recognize the rights of aboriginal peoples, was persuaded by some of the western provincial premiers to recognize only "existing rights" leaving "existing" of course undefined. What we have learned in the last eight years is that the aboriginal peoples have not been able to make any use of that clause in the constitution. They cannot even get to the bargaining table when their rights are being bargained away.

Nations like the Lubicons have been chiseled out of land rights that were promised to them, the same as the Temagami people in Ontario. There was chiselling and is chiselling on the post-secondary educational rights by a government which has plenty of money for developing certain war projects and therefore has no money for the people of Canada.

There are cramped reserves, poor housing, poor health care services for Canada's First Nations. In the cities, there is much too frequent violence by the police forces and statements, for example, by officials of the Toronto Police Force clearly implying that black people do not have rights and that native people do not have rights.

There is a low intensity warfare being conducted on the homeland of the Innu people. The government is spending hundreds of millions of dollars preparing that; hundreds of thousands of dollars with propaganda to justify it. This is because they are one of Canada's First Nations and they are treated almost as non-persons. This situation cannot be trivialized out of existence by creating a department of multiculturalism or even a Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.