

*Indian Bands Claims Settlement*

because of the effects of pollution. The fact that this Bill will not go to a legislative committee should not be distressing or disquieting to any Hon. Member since it would not be possible to amend it anyway. If people wished to amend a Bill of this type it would have to go back to all the parties.

When I note that the hand of Justice Emmett Hall is in this agreement it gives me great confidence that this is the best possible agreement that could have been reached since he has such an outstanding reputation in this country. He is surely one of the greatest humanitarians in the entire history of Canada.

I wish to say that the problem with the Grassy Narrows Indian Band and the Islington Indian Band touches me personally. I was a resident in the community of Dryden at the time it was learned that mercury from the pulp and paper mill had polluted the English and Wabigoon Rivers. There was evidence early on that people were suffering in terms of health. Later on that suffering became much more than just a matter of health. It became a serious problem of social dislocation. Serious psychological problems arose. It spelled the destruction of a way of life of a people, a people in this country whom, as the Minister has said, few of us appreciate, understand and even care a small amount about. I am talking about the Indian people of the country, the aboriginal people. Some day it will dawn upon the consciousness of Canada that we owe a huge debt to the first citizens of this country, a debt that can never be paid. However, we can certainly work actively and diligently toward the justice which the first citizens of Canada deserve. After all, we are the beneficiaries of those first citizens, the aboriginal peoples of Canada. Most of us are the descendants of newcomers to this country. We have profited from the land which was derived from reaching agreements, in certain cases treaties, which were never in my view honoured either by letter or in spirit.

With respect to the Grassy Narrows Band, the Islington Band and the community which was once known as Whitedog, I think there are some lessons which have to be learned. One of the lessons is that when environmental matters are raised in the House of Commons they can never, ever, be taken lightly under any circumstances. When we hear references to toxic substances in the Niagara River system we cannot say that it is just another issue which Members who live there or members of the Opposition are concerned about. I say this because I learned from the English and Wabigoon Rivers' problem and the effect it had on the Indian people that those environmental problems are real. They are not esoteric or theoretical. They are real. They touch people where they live, how they earn their living, their health and their well-being in every single respect. When we neglect serious environmental concerns in the country we are simply inviting tragic consequences. There is no more tragic consequence that I am aware of than that at Grassy Narrows and Whitedog.

As I have said, these people have suffered terribly. In reaching this settlement, which I welcome, I wish to say that my confidence in certain aspects of our society over that 16-

year period has been very sorely tried. For example, my confidence in the goodwill of the corporate sector of the country has been sorely tried. I do not think, in the history of Canadian corporations, that any company involved in this problem with the people of Whitedog and Grassy Narrows can take any pride in it at all. It is really a shameful part of our history. My confidence has also been sorely tried in the ability of Government to move with a sense of haste and urgency in dealing with serious and obvious cases of injustice. It is a crying shame that it has taken 16 years to reach nothing more than a monetary settlement with these people. A settlement has been reached; certainly it is long overdue. There will be no delay from myself or from members of my Party. We want this settlement ratified and put into effect very quickly.

• (1730)

In conclusion, I want to indicate that the compensation package for these Indian people is only a very humble attempt to correct a wrong. It seems that all we can do is to offer money. That money will be well used. It is required and necessary. However, let the House know that in no way can we heal all the wounds or undo all the harm. In passing this measure with a minimum amount of debate, I can only say that it is the very, very least we can do.

**Mr. John Parry (Kenora—Rainy River):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to add today some brief comments to the consideration of Bill C-110, as we move toward passing it and ratifying the agreement which has been accomplished between the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, Reed, Great Lakes Forest Products, the Islington Indian Band at Whitedog, and the Grassy Narrows Indian Band.

As the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior (Mr. Penner) rightly observed, this is but a partial restitution for the tragedy. It is not my intention today to go into a lengthy exposition of the nature of the tragedy. While it certainly bears repetition, reiteration and holding up as an example to Hon. Members of the House and indeed the people of the country, to do so in the House of Commons at the final phase of the ratification of the agreement would not be appropriate. I would rather charge every Member of the House, and indeed every citizen of the country, with studying the tragedy of Whitedog and the tragedy of Grassy Narrows. They should vow to themselves that such tragedies should never be allowed to happen again.

As most of us are the descendants of newcomers to this country, we should appreciate the legacy the native people of Canada, the Indian and Inuit alike, have given to us. There are those of us who are newcomers to the country. I hope I speak for the majority of us when I say that we appreciate that we are, in a very real sense, enjoying what the Indian and Inuit people of Canada have granted to us freely and in a spirit of goodwill, brotherhood, and co-operation, which we unfortunately have been somewhat tardy and somewhat inconsistent in returning.