

Government Orders

• (1650)

We talk about the special relationships. I know we have a special relationship, but I do not mean special in the way that we are better off than anyone. We have a unique relationship which no other group has in this country. We want governments to honour that.

This government has proceeded to do what has not been done, and that is to settle and implement inherent right to self-government. We are not asking it to give us self-government. It has never been anyone else's concern to give us anything. It is a matter of acknowledging that we have always had that.

We talk about the Fathers of Confederation in Charlottetown. What about our forefathers who signed the treaties? Can they not be mentioned in history as contributing to the well-being of everybody else in this country? There is no formal recognition of our people. All we are asking for is to settle the outstanding issues, the treaty obligations. The spirit and intent of the treaties should be honoured.

Many people have risen and spoken here but all we asked for, compared with what money has been spent, has been very little. Consider how much land and resources have been generated in this country and shared by the aboriginal people. I am sure billions and billions of dollars have been made off this great country. Yet when we ask for money we are not asking in the sense that we are begging for it, we have been asking governments to honour their treaty obligations, if only a small portion allocated under the control of First Nations.

If we look at the treaty making process, government officials went back and developed the wording. They never really understood what the native people were saying. First, our way of life and our philosophy is to share what we have so we shared the land and the resources so that we would have respect for each other, that we would live side by side with each and that we would co-exist with each other and help each other. That was the spirit and intent.

It was never our intention to be governed by a government. We have never extinguished or surrendered the right to govern ourselves. It has never been that. When we signed the treaties they were signed nation to nation. As a matter of fact, it was a recognition when we signed treaties that we were nations. As a nation we expect governments not to act unilaterally in the way history has shown us and in which they created the Indian Act which has total control over our lives. It even defines who we are today. This has to be done away with and we have to have a renewed partnership. That is the challenge that faces us today. How can we honour that? I know we have honoured our bargain. We expect the government with the support of the opposition to honour the promises of its forefathers, those they made to us. We do not expect anything more or anything less. That is all we ask

for, we do not ask for very much. We have been very patient for a very long time and it is time the government honour those treaties.

• (1655)

That is why I am very honoured to speak on Bill C-16. It is a very small part. We want to be part of this country and we have contributed so much to this country as well, but no one seems to talk about it or at least acknowledge it. If they acknowledge it somehow they seem to be obligated that they have to provide more things or more benefits.

If the governments alone were to provide for their treaty obligations there would really be no need to ask for more funding. We talk about finality. In the treaties it says as long as the sun shines and the rivers flow and the grass grows. That is the terminology used. It is forever, the relationship that we have.

We are very committed to this country. We want Canada to be wealthy. We want Canada to be united. We love this country. We love this land. We love everybody. I often say jokingly that our immigration policy was wide open, and it has been to show what kind of people we have been. We have been very kind but it has been the governments here that have always dictated and put restrictions on. It seems like within our own homeland we are treated like foreigners, we are treated like outside citizens, second class citizens.

The first order of business should be the First Nations business in this country. We should settle the treaties and settle land claims. I speak in favour of this bill. I hope members will support this bill.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member for Churchill on his first participation in debate. I think we were very appreciative of the words he spoke, his commitment to Canada, and the warmth and conviction with which he speaks.

I have spoken to many Canadians and I am sure I speak for millions of Canadians who would like to express appreciation to the hon. member for Churchill for the part he played in the debate over the Meech Lake accord. I have had many people express to me their appreciation for the fact that the hon. member for Churchill played a major and a significant role in defeating the Meech Lake accord and preventing it from being imposed upon Canadians.

I also want to congratulate the hon. member on his concern over Canada as being a country built on two founding races. I know that my Reform colleagues and I for many years now have shared the view that as a false conception of Canada it is not relevant in very many parts of the country and certainly does not recognize the role played by the true founding race of Canada, the aboriginal people.