

place in Manitoba, but, nevertheless, it did take place. We have to hand it to Elijah Harper and the way in which he handled it, knowing that for many decades Aboriginal rights and Aboriginal concerns have not been fully dealt with.

Last night I was lying in my bed watching television, using the wind as an example. The wind blows in different directions. Sometimes the dust that was blowing landed on the Aboriginal peoples; sometimes we ended up clutching a leaf. Using that as an example, I have only been collecting the dust. Similarly, my people have only been collecting the dust of the system that exists today. It is covering my people today, along with the rest of the people in this country. If there is to be any peace in this country, we have to think seriously about tomorrow. I do not think we are thinking about tomorrow. That is what is wrong with this government today.

Senator Flynn: It is not the government.

Senator Watt: The government of today is looking at the situation and planning strategy from one day to the next, but it cannot see what is down the road.

Senator Flynn: I do not think you do either!

Senator Watt: This is an important matter, and it should not be taken lightly. I urge you, as Leader of the Government in the Senate, to take this matter seriously, go to the Prime Minister and have him contact the rest of the premiers in this country immediately to show some flexibility, because there is a way to make an amendment to the Meech Lake Accord through the political accord or the companion resolution. There is no certainty in it for the Aboriginal peoples, nor is there a certainty for the rest of the people in this country.

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, the honourable senator was present on Thursday night, together with representatives of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Council of Canada, and the Métis National Council, when I met with them and with Miss Campbell, the Minister of Justice, and Mr. Siddon, the Minister of Indian Affairs, to discuss the agreement reached by the 11 first ministers here in Ottawa.

The honourable senator will recall the concerns that were placed on the table at that time, and that were put forward at that time by representatives of the Aboriginal associations. He will recall the statements I made to them at that time also. In addition to that, he should read the letter the Prime Minister sent to Chief Fontaine on June 18, 1990. In that letter the Prime Minister effectively responds, and in a positive way, to many, if not all, of the points that were raised at the meeting he and I attended on Thursday night.

• (1510)

Senator Watt: Honourable senators, I was at that meeting but I had not intended to refer to what went on there, but since the Leader of the Government has raised the matter I might as well indicate that it too is part of my concern. What I saw at that meeting was a great deal of confusion on the part of the people who were making the plea, if you can call it that, to the

[Senator Watt.]

Aboriginal people. If I remember correctly, what took place on that day is that the Leader of the Assembly of First Nations asked specifically, "Is there room to negotiate?" If I also remember correctly, the reply was to the effect that there were no avenues open or no procedure in place to provide for the negotiations. So I am not so sure that there was sincerity on the part of the government or a willingness to enter into negotiations.

Coming back to the Prime Minister's proposal, I have read it, and I understand the content of what is written there in the offer made to the Indians of Manitoba. The question is: Is it legal and binding? Does it provide a safeguard to the Aboriginal people if they accept what is being proposed? I do not think so. If there is no certainty, I know for a fact that the Aboriginal people of this country will not agree to something that holds nothing but false promises. If the Leader of the Government can show me that the proposal is legal and binding, I will be the first person to take it to Manitoba and say, "Let's make some modifications to this document and send it back to the Prime Minister." The fact is that that proposal is not binding on the government.

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, I suggest that the honourable senator might want to find the appropriate time to debate the matter. Obviously, he has many views on it to express. When the honourable senator does choose to debate the matter at the appropriate time, I hope he will take the opportunity to indicate his position as to whether or not he accepts and supports the various proposals made by the Prime Minister in his letter to Chief Fontaine.

SENATE REFORM

PROCESS OF FUTURE APPOINTMENTS—REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn: Honourable senators, I should like to ask a question of the Leader of the Government in the Senate. It is particularly apropos today with the appointment to the Senate of Mr. Waters of Alberta, given the process of selection which brought him here.

Last week Senator MacDonald and I asked questions with regard to the Senate provisions agreed to approximately one week ago by the first ministers. In particular, is there an agreement, as the Leader of the Government himself appears to believe, that for a period of five years, while constitutional discussions on the Senate proceed, there will be no further elections of candidates, wherever they may be in the country, as nominees to the Senate? Or is that which was expressed by Premier Getty the reality, namely, that he had given no such undertaking and would feel free, if he chose, to proceed with a selection process to fill a vacancy?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, I recall the questions of last week. However, I must confess that I have not had an opportunity to seek or obtain any clarification or further information on the matter. I shall make an effort shortly.