

Supply

order to get their views. I proposed several times that we should have proceeded in the same way as the Special Committee on Indian Self-Government and have the main representatives sitting at the table with us, but that was turned down for one reason or another.

The problems we are having with Indian issues in this country are continuing. The same mistakes are being repeated over and over again because there are still too many individuals in the Government of Canada who do not really understand what aboriginal rights mean, and who do not really understand what Indian self-government means. When I say there are "individuals" in the Government of Canada, I do not mean only the elected Members; I mean senior officials, bureaucrats, some elected people and some Ministers. There are still too many of them. If we did not have so many of them, we would not see the kind of document which was leaked the other day. We also would not have the confusion where we get acceptable statements by the Minister on the one hand and the type of proposals in the task force document on the other.

I would like to repeat myself, Mr. Speaker, because I believe it has to be repeated over and over again. People ask what aboriginal rights are, what they mean in the way they are now recognized in Section 35 of the new Constitution. As far as my understanding of it is concerned, they are all those rights which the aboriginal peoples had on this continent prior to contact with the Europeans, related to their lands, languages, social and economic structures, customs, religion and Government. These aboriginal people, before contact with the Europeans, had all of those things. They had societies, they had governments, languages, economies and religion. Those were their rights and they did not cede them after the Europeans came. Nor were they conquered, although there were battles here in Canada. However, although we just remembered the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II, I do not think we believe that if you conquer another people you have the right to take away their rights and impose on them your way of doing things. We fought that war because we did not believe in that way of life. We believe that people have the right to keep their own way of doing things unless they voluntarily give them up or make agreements with the other party to change them. But here we have a situation where the aboriginal people of Canada had these rights, these Governments, these languages, these lands and waters, and these economies which involve fishing, hunting and trapping, and they never gave them up. We should recognize that they are still there, and we have recognized them in Section 35 of the Constitution, in my opinion.

● (1510)

Indian self-government is one of those aboriginal rights and several Members of this House spent a lot of time on the Special Committee on Indian Self-Government pursuing that matter. As a matter of fact, from July, 1982, to October, 1983, we had 60 public hearings in many parts of the country, almost 40 of them were outside Ottawa, taking place on reserves and friendship centres, and we got the views of the Indian people. I think probably there was no other exercise in

the history of Canada where a parliamentary committee or commission heard the views of so many Indians. There were 55 recommendations, and what is interesting is that all of them were unanimous. Seven Members of Parliament from three political Parties, as well as three native representatives, unanimously agreed on the recommendations.

Nevertheless, at the First Ministers' Conference, despite the process the special committee went through, we still saw provincial Governments and politicians who misunderstand what is meant by the self-government term and who fear it. They think it is in some way going to threaten them, their Governments and their constitutional structures. Unfortunately, colonialism still remains a fact of life in Canada because we see Governments and parliamentarians—although not all of them—who take the position that we must continue to legislate for Indians as if we knew best. We do not trust the Indians to do things for themselves. We feel they will not do the right thing, therefore we should do it for them. That is a very strange point of view on our part because we certainly made a mess of things for over 100 years. We set up a Department of Indian Affairs, passed the Indian Act, made amendments to that Act, and more than 100 years later Indian communities are living in abject poverty. The social conditions there are horrible in many cases, with high rates of suicide, alcoholism and imprisonment. And we are the ones running things, they are not.

It is evident to me that if there is going to be a basic change we must recognize the right to self-determination of these Indian peoples. We must grant them the self-government they used to have. In fact, they still have it but we are interfering with it. We must let them run their own affairs and their own lives. They must have the right to make their own mistakes. Surely they will not make as many as we have. We all know that when you run your own affairs you make mistakes from time to time, but we have to recognize that we made more mistakes and that half-way measures will not work.

Bill C-31, Mr. Speaker, is an example of a half-way measure. We recognize the right to Indian self-government to a certain extent, but not fully. As a result, we get into all sorts of complex problems. Simply to throw money at the problem will not work. Funding is necessary for Indian Government, just as it is for provincial Governments and federal Governments, but they have to control those Governments themselves and set the priorities themselves.

I would like to conclude by quoting a statement that we put in the front of our report on Indian self-government. It was submitted to us by the Mayo Indian band in the Yukon when they appeared before us. It was spoken by Leo Tolstoy in 1886 and it is:

I sit on a man's back choking him and making him carry me and yet assure myself and others that I am sorry for him and wish to lighten his load by all possible means except by getting off his back.

Mr. Jim Manly (Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion put forward by my friend from Cochrane Superior because I think that this issue is of importance to all Canadians and not