

Indian Act

group, consisting of those Indians who were on the waiting list for access to band housing. This group is now going to swell to include the 22,000-plus women who lost their status and the 50,000-odd first-generation children of those women who have to make application. I am not saying that all these people are going to want to return but the problem of how to integrate them, even if it is only 10 per cent or 20 per cent, will have to be addressed by the Minister in a very concrete way.

The Minister has indicated that band membership will now be controlled by the bands themselves. While I support this basic principle, I do have some concerns that the women who wish to return to their bands will not be able to participate in the democratic process of establishing band codes. How can they participate in the decision-making if they are not residents on the reserves, which is one of the main criteria in being a band decision-maker? In certain instances that is not the case, but in other instances it is.

I am very positively predisposed to this Act. I am just highlighting some of the areas where I can see that the Minister faced a conundrum in how to resolve this problem. Decisions affecting women and children without their input could cause various concerns.

I understand with respect to the transmittal of status that women who lost their status will now have it back but their children will be treated differently from the children of an Indian man who married a non-Indian woman. Therefore, if I understand it correctly, one can be in a situation where first cousins who are of Indian ancestry will not have the right to claim that ancestry, which could put them into conflict. I hope that that problem will be resolved.

I want to add my voice, Mr. Speaker, to that of the women of the Indian lands and express appreciation for the fine effort which was undertaken by the Minister. He has made a bold move in introducing this Bill. I support the removal of discrimination in the Indian Act and the measures to abolish enfranchisement, and to restore status and band membership to those who lost it unfairly.

● (1450)

He also has made a significant move toward Indian control over their own affairs through the band membership provisions. Colonialism, sexism and racism have certainly been addressed and I congratulate him for the effort. I look forward to hearing in committee from the many interested groups and I certainly hope the Minister's wish that any improvement that can be realized will be realized and shall become a reality.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions or comments? Since there are no questions or comments, I recognize the Hon. Member for Nunatsiak (Mr. Suluk).

Mr. Thomas Suluk (Nunatsiak): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to take part in the discussion of changes to the Indian Act. I would first of all like to congratulate the Minister on his excellent and rewarding speech, as well as all other Hon. Members who discussed the need to rectify many of the wrongs relating to native people in general.

Although I have never been quite sure whether Inuit do in fact fall under the Indian Act, I will attempt to illustrate to Members of the House that there are still opportunities to avoid many of the things that are wrong with the Indian Act. Specifically, I would like to make some initial comments about what is happening with the same kind of issues that northern people are dealing with at the present time, or at this moment in history.

Although the Indian Act, Mr. Speaker, was created many, many years ago, and perhaps many of its contents may not have foreseen the problems that might develop such as the ones we are now dealing with, we are also dealing with many of the same kinds of difficult issues in the north through the land claims forum, the modern treaties as it were, which are being conducted between the Governments and other native peoples of Canada. I would just like to give some brief examples.

First of all, a few years ago the Inuit were discussing the problems that might be coming up as a result of any land claim settlement, and we were discussing at one time at what stage we would stop calling Inuit the Inuit in terms of their blood relationships. For example, would we stop calling someone an Inuit when it gets to the 25 per cent stage? That is where the child has only 10 per cent, 15 per cent or 25 per cent of native blood or Inuit blood. Many of these things were very technical and very disconcerting to many of the Inuit in my riding, especially in the Northwest Territories. I would hope that before agreements of this type are reached again with other native people in Canada, specifically those in the Western Arctic areas and in the Eastern Arctic areas, both the Government and the people negotiating on behalf of the respective Indian or Inuit side would foresee many of these problems that governments in the future might have to deal with.

I would just like to relate a brief story about how discrimination against Inuit women was dealt with by one community. It is not dealt with across the Territories but we have a very classic example in my own town of Eskimo Point, Northwest Territories. It concerns the Inuit ladies who are married to Kabloonat, as we call them. In much the same way as we are known as Eskimos to some southerners, we also refer to non-Inuit in the south as Kabloonat. It is not a derogatory term by any means, just a reference that we do have in the north. Inuit women who are married to Kabloonat, that is, not Inuit or, I think the term is, Caucasian or something, did not have the rights and were starting to complain because they could not hunt polar bears. Traditionally, only Inuit men hunt polar bears. However, the polar bear skin has quite a lot of value. In the north, where the economy is not all that great, you can get \$1,000 or \$2,000 for a polar bear skin, and then naturally it becomes a desirable thing to have. To go back to the story about the Inuit women who felt discriminated against, they raised a big issue out of it in the local press—well, there is no press, just the radio and public meetings and all that—and said that because their husbands are not Inuit