

Indian Reserve Minerals Revenue Sharing Act

This bill offers a cash settlement that on the face of it is very generous. However, we must remember that this cash settlement is in exchange for the denial of rights as well as for the sale of minerals. Bill C-26 will make it possible for the people of the Fort Nelson Indian Band to assimilate on fairly good terms with the larger non-Indian society. From my point of view Bill C-26 does not offer much hope that the people of the Fort Nelson Indian Band will be able to develop their own identity, their own culture, and their own economy. It leads to assimilation, not to development.

Indian organizations like the National Indian Brotherhood and the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs have indicated that they want settlements of their claims which will allow them to develop their own economic base. In turn, once they have this base, they will be able to develop their total society. Perhaps I can illustrate this by reading from the Nishga Declaration, a statement from the Nishga tribal council in northwestern British Columbia:

We as Nishgas, are living in a world where dynamic initiatives must be taken to achieve self-determination especially in respect of the natural resources of the Naas Valley, in order to control our own process of development within the larger Canadian society and to make decisions that affect our lives and the lives of our children. We realize that our struggle for self-determination will be a difficult one, but we refuse to believe that it is in vain, if governments and the Nishga people agree to their mutual responsibility for that growth and development. Nishga self-determination of resource development within the Naas Valley is the economic base that will allow for self-determination of the other aspects of modern twentieth century society that makes up this Canada of ours.

Also, we, the Nishga people, believe that both the government of B.C., and the Government of Canada must be prepared to negotiate with the Nishgas on the basis that we, as Nishgas, are inseparable from our land, that it cannot be bought or sold in exchange for 'extinguishing of title'.

● (2030)

This statement is typical of Indian statements from across the country; it indicates the direction we must go to settlements and cash respecting aboriginal rights. The Indian people want a recognition of their rights, not a real estate deal that will buy them off.

Indian people do not want a life of clipping coupons any more than they want a life collecting welfare. They want a chance to develop healthy societies for themselves and for their children.

The people of the Fort Nelson Band have had a long struggle. After 20 years they think that Bill C-26 represents the best agreement they can reach. Considering the negative attitude of the British Columbia government, and the indifference of the federal government, they may be right. But we must condemn the Government of Canada for making this unsatisfactory settlement seem so desirable and so necessary to these people.

Dealing with more specific issues, this bill has several shortcomings. Although it deals with Indian resources, it is a bilateral agreement between the governments of British Columbia and of Canada. This, of course, reflects the lack of standing Indian bands have in Canadian law—a bill dealing with their resources does not include them. This points to the need for Indian involvement in constitutional talks. The time is

past when they should be looked on as wards of the federal government. The time has come when they should be able to speak for themselves and sign for themselves. This becomes crucial when we look at the provisions for arbitration in section 12 of the attached agreement.

This section gives both British Columbia and Canada the right to apply for arbitration in the case of disagreement. But how about the people most affected by the bill? What happens if the people of Fort Nelson are not satisfied with the way in which the agreement is being implemented? There is nothing in this bill that gives them any recourse at all. They must depend upon the good offices of the federal government. When we look at the record of that government over the last 113 years, we cannot be very confident.

Last year this House unanimously approved a resolution calling for an audit of the government's handling of Indian trust funds. That audit has not been forthcoming in spite of the motion, and we are being told that there are difficulties. Indeed, many of the trust funds have not been audited at all since 1942. No wonder Indian organizations no longer trust the federal government. There has been no audit since 1942, Mr. Speaker. The government, however, has the presumption to tell the Indian bands that they have not properly accounted for the funds given to them. The House of Commons, supposedly speaking for all the people of Canada, now faces the same kind of stonewalling that the Indian people had to face when they asked for an accounting. We passed a motion asking for this audit but all we are told is that there are difficulties.

Speaking at the All Chiefs Conference at the beginning of May, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Munro) made a commitment that he would tell the chiefs how the interest rates for Indian trust moneys were calculated. He promised to show a comparison of the rate for these Indian trust funds with the rates paid by chartered banks. The minister promised that this would be ready in two months. Although that time has passed, no such information has been forthcoming. In the face of this kind of indifference, incompetence, and unaccountability, how can we have confidence in an arbitration process that gives the Indian people no access, but instead tells them to rely on the good offices of the federal government?

As I said earlier, I will vote for this bill because it is what the people of Fort Nelson Indian Band want. It represents the best deal they feel they can negotiate. But I regret its inadequacies and I urge the government to clear the way for Indian participation in constitutional talks, a proper recognition and entrenchment of Indian rights and Indian governments. If that happened, inadequate bills such as this which do not touch the deeper problems will no longer be necessary.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jack Shields (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate the two chiefs of the Fort Nelson Band who had the courage to take the initiative and get this agreement in place that is now before this House as Bill C-26.