

studies been carried out, and has the minister sent a reply to the Northern Development Council?

Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, studies have been carried out. I do not recall having received a request from the development council which the hon. member has in mind, but I will check this and send them copies of the studies.

Mr. Speaker: Orders of the day.

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Speaker, we have had some discussion about the matter I raised earlier. It is hoped that the following might appeal to the House. As there will not be enough time today for hon. members to be advised of all the facts on this very interesting subject, it has been suggested that the first speaker for each party might speak for half an hour and all other speakers for 15 minutes. As I understand it, the government will undertake to bring the matter back for one hour's debate, hopefully at the same time as the motion standing in the name of the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway, at which time members may be able to come to a decision as to what they want to do and whether there will be a vote.

Mr. Howard: Mr. Speaker, I accept the first part of the suggestion but I am reluctant to accept the idea that we come back for one hour's debate or set a time limit on the subject matter. I am reluctant to accept the suggestion that if it is talked out tonight there should be that restriction if it is brought back as a result of government initiative.

Mr. Speaker: There is apparently agreement as to the length of speeches. If there is unanimous consent, it will be so ordered.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: The motion has already been put. The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

CONCURRENCE IN SECOND REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands) that the second report of the standing committee on Indian affairs and Northern development, presented to the House on April 4, 1973, be concurred in.

Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I indeed feel privileged to have the opportunity to move this motion to concur in the second report of the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development. It is my hope that the government will allow this motion to come to a vote.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Indian Affairs

Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): The subject we are discussing today deals with the concept of aboriginal title. Today, Mr. Speaker, is the first time this vital matter has been debated in the House; the first time in over 100 years that it has received the attention and consideration of the House as a whole. Why is this? Is it because it was not considered of significance and importance in our earlier history? No, indeed. It is because this is the first time a government has failed to recognize the concept of aboriginal rights and has rejected the concept outright.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Previous governments may have failed to fulfil their obligations to the hundreds of thousands of Indian people, but they never questioned the principle. Not until 1969, following the introduction of the government's white paper on Indian policy when the minister stated that aboriginal claims to land were not realistic, was a Prime Minister of this country to say of this question, and I quote the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau):

Our answer, it may not be the right one and may not be the one which is accepted . . . our answer is no.

The issue of aboriginal rights is tremendously important. This is not a fad; this is a fact. By our action in this House we acknowledge the significance and importance of aboriginal rights, not only to members of this House but also to the hundreds of thousands of native people in every province and territory of this country. It is these native people, exhausted with constant questions of what aboriginal rights mean to them, tired of telling us of their attachment to the land which once fed, clothed and housed them, who are watching with interest what we do and say in this House. It is incumbent upon us, therefore, to clarify the confusion which has surrounded the whole question of aboriginal rights in the past few years. Simply stated, aboriginal rights, native title or whatever expression the government is comfortable with is simply the right of an Indian tribe or band to use and occupy their traditional lands.

In recent weeks the government has elaborated on its stance. It has elaborated on, but not clarified, its position. For instance, the Prime Minister said at the time of the Nishga judgment:

Perhaps you had more legal rights than we thought you had when we did the white paper.

The Progressive Conservatives have no such qualifications—no ifs, no ands, no perhaps's. We will not shirk our responsibility by saying we are merely thinking about the concept. We give wholehearted recognition to the concept of aboriginal rights. I may say, we deplore the failure of the present government to boldly face this issue.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): The Progressive Conservative Party undertakes to settle fairly the outstanding aboriginal claims of Canada's native people. We intend to work toward a negotiated settlement of disputed treaty and aboriginal claims, and we will do so in full and fair consultation with the native peoples involved.