

*Government Orders*

This is unacceptable because the Government of Canada is supposed to be the trustee for certainly aboriginal people but the rights and interests of treaty people are supposed to be protected by the government. Their trustee in 1989 at that late stage was not even aware they had any interest whatsoever in that territory. That is negligence.

• (1435)

Then it became very inconvenient to deal with this new factor which had come into the negotiations. Therefore when it came to dealing with the fundamental question of treaty rights, the attitude of the Government of Canada can only be described as intransigent.

Certainly, it made resources available to document use and occupancy through negotiating section 40 of the agreement. It did everything else virtually except that implied treaty and aboriginal rights. It could never bring itself to fundamentally address the question of treaty and aboriginal rights.

Then regrettably in the closing moments of this whole process, after the agreement had been signed, members of Parliament are aware of the kinds of threats that circulated around this House of what would happen if there was any delay in this legislation. That is really unfortunate. However, wiser heads prevail.

The hon. member for Nunatsiak and I always had the feeling that if the Inuit and the Dene people were able to meet face to face to resolve these issues, the resolution would not only be possible but it would also be an important part of this whole process.

Indeed on Tuesday that came to pass. An agreement was signed between the Denesuline of northern Saskatchewan and the Inuit. I have that in my hands and I would like to table it when my speech is done.

Part I of this letter says that the Inuit of Nunavut recognize that Saskatchewan's Denesuline have traditionally used and continue to use certain lands north of the 60th parallel based on their treaty and aboriginal rights.

That was a very important milestone, not just because of the substance of the agreement. Even more important, it demonstrated that two aboriginal groups could themselves arrive at agreements that the Government of Canada in some ways was virtually irrelevant in.

I would like very much to compliment everybody who was involved in negotiating this overlap agreement. It recognizes that Nunavut is much stronger as an entity if it has allies rather than adversaries on its borders. It points to a new partnership in that part of the world which will be of benefit, not just to the people involved, but to all Canadians.

It might also be recognized that an agreement was signed between the Dene of Manitoba and the Inuit some time prior to that. That agreement forms an important part of the movement forward in the creation of Nunavut as well.

I add the caveat that there are court cases outstanding to establish Canada's recognition of the treaty and aboriginal rights.

With the creation of Nunavut, the tide of Canadian history is turning. For far too long, since the time of contact, there has been a sense that what needed to happen was for aboriginal peoples to learn from Europeans, to adopt their technology, ways, governments, languages and cultures. It has been a one-way street, at least as far as the records are concerned. Certainly for the explorers, the fur traders and many others, there has been two-way communication but overwhelmingly it has been a one-way street.

With this agreement the tide starts to turn. We start to learn from aboriginal people. We start to learn about consensus decision making that transcends the petty partisanship which often characterizes our politics. It talks about respect for the elders and their history. We also get to learn a profound sense of the sacredness of mother earth and our responsibilities as her creatures.

I would like to conclude my remarks by saying what a pleasure it has been to be involved in this very important occasion in Canadian political life.