

*Government Orders*

at some point in the very near future. The decisions of the courts to date have been that land ownership and ownership of resources resides with the crown.

• (1235)

I will talk for a minute about who benefits from that ownership. Thirty million people live in Canada and to a great extent the wealth of the nation and the standard of living that those people enjoy depend on the land base and resources.

We are talking about the B.C. Treaty Commission. In British Columbia approximately 96 per cent of the land is owned by the crown. The balance is owned by individuals on a fee simple basis. What the Government of British Columbia is talking about doing under the auspices of the B.C. Treaty Commission is negotiating agreements which will convey, in its own words, approximately 5 per cent of the land base to approximately 3 per cent of the population. A good deal of that population does not live on reserves.

In addressing the concerns of people in British Columbia who depend on forestry, fishing and mining for their livelihood and all of the secondary and tertiary jobs that spin from that, it is clear the issue of land ownership and resource ownership is a very serious one.

I will talk a little about British Columbia's participation in this process and the concerns expressed by ordinary citizens in that province. As I have said, the land base is very important to the economy of the province.

The Government of British Columbia and the Government of Canada are entering into a negotiating process to settle, depending on who one is, treaties or land claims with aboriginal peoples. There has been virtually no public consultation. The beginning of that consultation process is starting to happen, but in my view it is happening in a way that will make it very difficult for the real views of ordinary British Columbians to be heard.

On a straightforward philosophical basis, most British Columbians are opposed to the general principle behind the treaty process. With the negotiation of the agreements described by government to date we will have, as my Reform colleague said a few minutes ago, enclaves within Canada which will have a land base and which will have their own governing bodies.

There is a great deal of concern over the divisiveness this will create. The parliamentary secretary referred to South Africa as have other people in the Chamber. In South Africa the people are working to break down barriers between different parts of society, between black and white. They have been working at removing the different status that people received in that country based on their racial origins.

In Canada we are going in the opposite direction. We are erecting further barriers. I suggest there are barriers right now. I think they are inherently wrong. That is one of the reasons native people find themselves in the very difficult circumstances they find themselves in. As a country we have treated them differently.

Most of us on this side of the House believe very strongly that Canada is a very big welfare state. The welfare state that government policy has created around native people is many times larger and it has been very harmful to native Indian people. It has been very destructive. We need to do away with that, to break down those barriers, to do away with the Indian Act and start to treat everybody in our country as equals.

• (1240)

That leads me to the next point. In a democracy one of the fundamental principles of democracy is equality before the law, individual freedom, individual liberty and the notion that we all participate in a democracy on the same basis.

Sovereignty inherently rests with the Government of Canada. The provinces are way stations but in the end, citizens have to a certain degree an ability to exercise personal sovereignty in that they are able to vote, to participate in the democratic process and to influence to some degree at least the direction the government takes.

When we start looking at people, whether native Indian or other racial minorities or groups that have distinctive characteristics and start treating those people differently and we suggest they should have different status, whether that status is supposed to assist those people or not however well meaning that might be, the end result is that we create divisions in our society.

We create an us versus them mentality and we violate the fundamental principles of democracy. We violate the fundamental principle of equality before the law. We do that as a nation at our peril.

We can see what has happened in British Columbia with the implementation of the aboriginal fishing strategy. No doubt it was a well intentioned strategy. The result is that we have native fishermen and non-native fishermen on the rivers in conflict with each other. We have the very real possibility of violent conflict right on our doorstep as a result of that policy. I would suggest to the House that the aboriginal fishing strategy is one component of what the government's agenda is all about.

We are not talking in negotiating these treaties about moving away from the apartheid that we already have and treating people as equals; we are talking about building further walls. We are talking about finding new and better ways to segregate people by race and treat them differently. By doing that, as I said earlier, we are endangering future civility and peace in our country.