

Government Orders

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Verran

• (1915)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed.)

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YUKON FIRST NATIONS LAND CLAIMS SETTLEMENT ACT

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development) moved that Bill C-33, an act to approve, give effect to and declare valid land claims agreements entered into between Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada, the Government of the Yukon Territory and certain First Nations in the Yukon Territory, to provide for approving, giving effect to and declaring valid other land claims agreements entered into after this act comes into force, and to make consequential amendments to other acts, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Elijah Harper (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great honour to participate in this debate and also to recognize a process which should have been resolved many, many years ago. It has taken a long time to get the recognition we deserve as First Nations in this country we call Canada, which happens to be an Indian word. I do not know if Reform members know what that means. Certainly they need to understand the real history of the country which today we call Canada. If it was not for the kindness and the generosity of the First Nations and its people this rich country would not benefit anybody.

• (1920)

I know we are talking about the land claims settlement agreement and also self-government but often times we combine the two because that is our philosophy, our way of thinking. We cannot isolate the land from day-to-day life. Our existence depends on the land and it is very important that people understand that.

If I go back to the time of the first European contact the governments that came to this country were met by First Nations on the shores of the St. Lawrence River or on the west coast of

British Columbia or on Hudson Bay and Winnipeg. The First Nations met these people and that relationship has never been concluded, has never been finalized. Certainly across the country there have been many agreements and treaties made with First Nations and that process has extended to areas where treaties have not been made such as the Northwest Territories and Yukon.

I always say that the first order of business has never been concluded with the first people, the first inhabitants, the First Nations.

The treaty making process is about establishing relationships. When the crown or the Queen's representatives came to this land they made treaties with the First Nations. What does it mean when you make treaties or agreements with the First Nations? It means that we entered into agreements. We established a relationship and these treaties and the modern day agreements are those agreements.

Treaties that were signed many years ago and today are about establishing relationships, how we are going to live with each other. Certainly the treaties that we signed in western Canada hundreds of years ago are still an ongoing process. They have not come to an end. Governments still have outstanding promises, treaty promises. We still have outstanding treaty land entitlements. We still want to resolve some of the issues like education that were promised to the Indian people.

Those things are ongoing. The treaties were signed years ago but it is an ongoing process because it is about establishing a relationship.

As I have said many times, we have never surrendered or extinguished the right to govern ourselves. As a matter of fact when the treaties were entered into, the Queen's representative, the crown, never questioned the authority and the jurisdictions of the First Nations. They respected it.

• (1925)

That is the fundamental relationship that the First Nations have with the Government of Canada, the treaty relationship. No other group of Canadian people have that relationship. It is a special relationship that we hold sacred and we bind the government to honour those commitments. Our elders tell us those are sacred agreements.

It is not something that was given to us. Our way of thinking, our philosophy, is to share what we have. Certainly in terms of land, our philosophy is that we cannot own it but rather we could only share it with the newcomers to this country.

There was conflict over the different value systems that the Europeans, when they came to this land, wanted to impose. They had a different value system such as land tenure which was quite foreign to us. Somehow they conferred that title on to us and