

which do not discriminate on the basis of sex. In this regard I was very pleased to receive a copy of a telex from the Aboriginal Council of British Columbia, which represents many different tribal federations and many different bands. I believe this telex indicates that Indian society is not static, chauvinistic or a relic of the past, but that it is dynamic, moving with the times and that Indian people themselves are committed to fairness. I would like to read the telex. It is from George Watts, chairman of the Aboriginal Council of British Columbia. It reads:

The Aboriginal Council of British Columbia meeting in full delegation Saturday, February 7, 1981, gave unanimous approval to the following resolution:

Moved by Ray Jones (Gitksan-Carrier Tribal Council) seconded by Leonard Tanner (Okanagan):

That all tribal groups in the province of British Columbia actively seek legislative change to the membership section of the Indian Act before the next quarterly meeting of the Aboriginal Council, and

That the tribal groups endorse the reinstatement of people of our nation not recognized as being Indian, and

That the chairman on behalf of tribal group representatives forward a telegram to the Minister of Indian Affairs informing him of our position.

This telex indicates that the Indian people are serious about removing discrimination. They do not want to be discriminated against by non-Indian society: they do not want to discriminate within Indian society. By recognizing their rights we will make it possible for Indian people to remove this kind of discrimination. By recognizing their rights in the Constitution we will make it easier for them to gain recognition of their economic and their political rights so that once again they can take their full place as members of the Canadian society.

I want to conclude, Mr. Speaker, by saying that I believe this is a good Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I believe this is a good Constitution. I am proud to give it support.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Benno Friesen (Surrey-White Rock-North Delta): Mr. Speaker, I take pleasure in participating in this debate. I had hoped to be able to do this last October when the debate began. As events proceeded, the government made certain not too many of us would be able to participate in the debate at that time. Thus, the speech I planned to make at that time had to be postponed.

I am pleased to follow my countryman from British Columbia who just concluded by saying this is a great Constitution and a great bill of rights. In the next few minutes I will be examining them to see whether they are as great as he says. Maybe he has very selective vision. We will see.

We must keep in mind as we debate this issue that it is an important issue for the House only because it is on the Order Paper. It is not an important issue before the country. I think members on both sides of the House will agree that the people across Canada believe it is the economic issues that ought to be debated in the House at this time. It is the inflation which we are facing in our country and the robbing of the low income group of 20 per cent of their pay cheques which should be before us for consideration.

The Constitution

● (2130)

An hon. Member: Two supporters have just arrived.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, I hope after all this applause you credit me with a few extra minutes, and then some.

An hon. Member: Three more just arrived.

Mr. Friesen: While every other western nation is debating the problems of energy supply and security, we debate the Constitution. It seems to me it is evident all across Canada that this Constitution, or any other, will not put one extra slice of bread on the table.

I spoke to a Liberal member from the eastern townships and asked how much he was getting on the constitutional issue and he said zero; yet we have the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) saying we have to pass this package now because the people of Quebec are demanding it. The people of Quebec know the important issue facing us today is the economy, and if this package addresses the referendum in Quebec, why do the three party leaders in the province of Quebec oppose it? We understand why Mr. Levesque might oppose it, but why does the Liberal leader in that province oppose this package if it is the answer to the referendum?

This package has the highest priority on the Order Paper only because the government controls the Order Paper.

I want to begin my remarks by paying tribute to my leader who on October 2 was given 90 minutes by the Prime Minister to study the text, analyse the issues, look at the problems and then address the people of Canada; 90 minutes, Mr. Speaker, in that short time he homed in on the critical issues facing the country now and in the future if this proposition passes in its present form.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Friesen: He did all Canadians proud. I was proud of him, and I know the people of Canada now recognize that it is because the Right Hon. Joe Clark assumed the leadership that night and it is because of his perceptions, his honesty and his willingness to put his future on the line, that we have an open and honest debate in the House of Commons.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Friesen: I also want to pay tribute to my colleague, the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) whom I watched very carefully during the debate in October and in the proceedings of the committee. I observed his skill, his patience and his statesmanship, and I want all members of this House, all the people of Canada, to know that I am proud to call him a brother.

Finally, I want to pay tribute to the hon. member for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve (Mr. Joyal). I came to this House at the same time as he, and I remember very well that he was the mover of the Speech from the Throne that year. I recall listening to the conversations of other members in the government benches at that time when they said this is a young man