

We do not preclude for a moment the possibility of going ahead with a royal commission in the future. We do want to give the Citizens' Forum an opportunity to get up and be running and to try, by means of public dialogue, to identify a consensus on those issues. Meanwhile, as the Prime Minister pointed out in his speech of, I believe, September 25, we are moving ahead on a number of fronts.

The honourable senator is aware that hitherto the government would agree to deal with only six comprehensive land claims at a time. We have taken that ceiling off. That is an important step. We are putting more resources into the negotiation of specific land claims. We are discussing with the Aboriginal leadership how we can accelerate that process.

Mr. Siddon has been speaking to Premier Devine over the last few days about treaty lands. The honourable senator is aware of the situation which has recently shown some hope for improvement in the attitude of the government of British Columbia. There are Indian-run child welfare agencies in parts of the country. We are going to extend those to the rest of the country, including British Columbia.

It should not be thought that, pending the activities of the Citizens' Forum, or some future royal commission, we are marking time. We are not. We are trying to move ahead on a very broad front.

### CITIZENS' FORUM

#### REPORT OF COMMISSION—INADEQUATE TIMETABLE— GOVERNMENT POSITION

**Hon. John B. Stewart:** May I ask a supplementary question concerning the Citizens' Forum?

I notice that in his statement in the other place on November 1, Mr. Mulroney said that Mr. Spicer will report to the government on the forum's findings by next June 30. There has been a good deal of talk about consensus, and I guess we all agree that consensus is a desirable thing. The Leader of the Government has indicated that consensus is desirable on a wide range of topics. I wonder if the government is not being too optimistic in thinking that a satisfactory level of consensus on this wide range of topics can be achieved by June 30, 1991.

I suggest to him that in this kind of discussion there are at least two phases. The first is a period when different groups define and clarify their stands. After that has been done on any one topic of disagreement, there are modifications and adjustments.

I ask the Leader of the Government in the Senate whether there is not a real danger, given the short time made available to the forum, that only the first of the two phases will be accomplished and perhaps only on one or two of the topics—that is, that there will be a definition and clarification, and indeed a hardening of positions; and that adequate time is not being allowed, at least as the forum's work is now anticipated, for the other phase, namely adjustment and modification.

• (1650)

**Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations):** The honour-

[Senator Murray.]

able senator is correct. One of the risks run in an exercise of this kind is that positions will harden, or the dialogue will become so harsh and bitter that in the search for a consensus we lose rather than gain ground. One of the other dangers is that the whole exercise could be taken over by special interest groups.

These are the risks that we run. Let me repeat: We hope that in the process of dialogue and exchange of views the views of all sides will become better known and better appreciated.

At the same time, Canadians must decide, at the outset, whether they still want a country, whether they still want to live together and whether they are prepared to make the accommodations that are necessary to do that, because we all know that there will need to be accommodations on all sides if we are to have any future at all in this country.

We are vesting in this Citizens' Forum a task which is fraught with all kinds of danger, as Mr. Spicer has pointed out, but which is essential to our future. We do not expect that the Citizens' Forum will be able to report that there is a consensus on the wide range of topics that I mentioned. We hope, however, that the forum will be able to report that there has been such a clarification of views, and such an improved understanding of positions that there will be the making of a consensus and that, most of all, Canadians are determined to live together in one country and are prepared to make the accommodations that are necessary. That, in itself, would be a tremendous educational achievement on the part of the Citizens' Forum.

#### ATTITUDE OF CHAIRMAN—DIRECTION OF COMMISSION— GOVERNMENT POSITION

**Hon. M. Lorne Bonnell:** Honourable senators, I know that many people have a great many questions concerning this very important matter. However, I would like to ask if the chairman of the commission runs the commission. Is he a dictator? Does he decide whom the forum will hear? Does he decide who will present their views?

It was my understanding that the purpose of this forum was to listen to what the Canadian people had to say, and report back to the government, not to go around saying, "We will not hear this one or that one. We will decide whom we will hear."

The second point I would like to make is that I understand the Indian leaders are not too anxious to come at all, because Senator Murray has said that it is futile for them to bring their particular issues forward. Yet one of the things that this forum is supposed to do is find out how the Aboriginal peoples feel about the rest of us.

Senator Murray says that it is futile to examine native issues while this national unity debate is continuing. So the Vice-Chairman of the Assembly of First Nations says, "There is no point in us appearing."

I understand also that Mr. Spicer has said that the first meeting will be held in Tuktoyaktuk, but that the only one to go there will be himself. Were all of these other great Canadians who are on this forum consulted? Again, who is running