

Government Orders

and provincial governments on the views of those who cannot be at the negotiating table but whose interests must be represented there.

The process functions at two levels. A 31-member treaty negotiation advisory committee, TNAC, brings the perspective of municipal governments, business, labour, fishing, wildlife, and environmental groups to the treaty making process. Each committee member sits on one of four sectoral groups representing lands and forests, fisheries, governance, and wildlife. The members ensure that the interests and expertise of their organizations are understood and are taken into consideration in treaty negotiations.

I have met with these advisory committee members. So has our colleague, the hon. member for Vancouver East. The BCTC commissioners and the federal and provincial negotiating teams provide updates to the members on the process of negotiations.

The second level of consultations brings the diverse interests of the various regions of the province to bear in the land claims process. Regional advisory committees are being struck in each treaty negotiation area to represent local interests. As part of the land claims process the BCTC requires a regional advisory committee be struck before Canada and B.C. are declared "ready to negotiate" a treaty with First Nations. These committees work directly with federal and provincial negotiating teams by providing input on the formulation of interest and comments on the options for discussions at the negotiating table. For example, we have formed committees in Bulkley-Skeena, West Coast Vancouver Island, Westbank Kelowna, and the lower mainland.

In the months ahead British Columbians will have an opportunity to participate in an historical process. They have the opportunity to correct an imbalance. For generations the people of British Columbia, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, have lived in a legal no-man's land of claims, conflicting claims, and refusal to acknowledge deep seated historical wrongs.

We are setting up a process whereby hundreds of years after the first interaction of two civilizations we can find a just and equitable resolution on how land and resources are to be shared. The all or nothing approach is not a solution for the 1990s. All parties, with good conscience, openness to new ideas, but with a new tough resolve to protect what is most important to each of us, must now sit at the negotiating table. We must talk. If we do not talk and if we do not resolve these issues through consultation and reconciliation we leave the field open to those who believe that the only resolution is all or nothing.

I have maintained all along that self-government agreements work best when designed from the ground up with the input of the people they affect. Now is not the time for land claim settlements by government decree or constitutional amendment.

Now is the time for creativity and flexibility for modern treaty making. It will be a slow, painstaking process. It will require a great reservoir of goodwill among all parties in the negotiating process. The process is harmed immeasurably by the kind of fearmongering and controversy we have seen stirred up by those who want to score short term political points.

I am confident that the negotiation process will succeed in British Columbia. I am confident because I have been working with my provincial colleagues, with the leaders of the First Nations, and the members of the treaty negotiating advisory committee. I know that these are people of goodwill who are dedicated to reaching an equitable solution.

Canadians and British Columbians must settle this unfinished business. I urge this House to support this legislation and give the federal commissioner the power to get on with the job.

• (1625)

Mr. Harris: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, considering that the government only presented the Reform members with this bill after 3 p.m. yesterday, which is in typical fashion, I would like to seek consent of the House if we may have the opportunity to question the minister about the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. I think the correct thing for the member to do is wait until he speaks on behalf of his party. Then he might ask the minister, if the minister will permit with unanimous consent, some questions and answers. It is entirely a matter for unanimous consent of the House.

Mr. Irwin: Mr. Speaker, we ended treaty at the Alberta border, and for 100 years we said we would come back and deal with these people who have lived there for 10,000 years.

Succeeding governments have tried to and made movement to start a process. But when I walk through these doors, as we all must at some point in our lives, the one thing I will be proud of is that in October 1993 this government was elected and in December 1993 the B.C. Treaty Commission doors were opened for negotiations.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, of course Bloc Quebecois members will support Bill C-107.

However there are a few concerns that should be addressed in the debate. Having always made a point of seeing for myself how aboriginal people live, I feel I am better able to speak, perhaps with a bit more assurance, about aboriginal issues, including the bill before us.

As recently as last summer, I had the great privilege of visiting British Columbia and meeting with some aboriginal nations, some communities which were deeply concerned about the negotiation and the British Columbia Treaty Commission.