

*Government Orders*

stand something of the richness of their history and culture, of the despair and devastation caused by systematic attempts to rewrite that history and suppress that culture. I feel enormous pride that we are moving forward together in this country to address the injustices confronting aboriginal Canadians and at long last recognizing their historical rights.

This is something that all of us can take pride in. I remember about two years ago speaking to the World Indigenous Peoples Conference. I was then in Norway. I spoke about indigenous peoples issues. I was surprised by the number of people who came up to me from Peru, from Guatemala. In Guatemala 80 per cent of that population are Indian people. They approached me to say how extraordinary it was in their view, from their political culture, to see a political leader addressing the issues of indigenous people. They had never seen that before.

How proud we can be in Canada that we have set an international standard which says that the recognition of the rights of Canada's first peoples by this country are also valued and respected.

I must add that while we in Canada have facilitated that process, especially since 1982 and now in this accord, and that leaders of different political parties have supported this and have begun to listen to aboriginal people, let me say that it is directly due to aboriginal people themselves, to their strength, who persevered to be heard, to be listened to. I believe that Canadians at this place in our history cannot afford to say no to the First Nations of this country but rather, to say yes to an historic achievement.

• (1650)

There is no doubt we have made many mistakes in the first 500 years of contact between whites—immigrants to this country—and the First Nations of North America. Let us look at this agreement as the first step in the second 500 years to greater equality, greater justice and greater harmony.

As I said earlier, the regional realities of Canada have also been recognized in the constitutional agreement. The imbalance in Confederation in population, power and economic strength has been acknowledged and addressed in a number of forms and in the strengthening of the regional development clause. An attempt has been made to do that in the Senate as well.

The agreement on Senate reform represents another example of Canadian compromise. The result is not my first choice. It is not the first choice of this party, but it does demonstrate a willingness on the part of Canadians to try to find new solutions to old grievances and to take that risk to ensure all the concerns of the various regions of the country can be addressed.

[*Translation*]

The recognition of Quebec's distinct character, the aboriginal government, the reform of institutions, the social charter, a more comprehensive Canada clause, those are the reasons the New Democratic Party supports this agreement.

Our Constitution will allow a greater number of people to feel accepted and to feel concerned. It will enable them to know they have a place in our collective future. However, this does not mean that everybody will feel included. It does not mean that this agreement will solve everything. There will always be people who will feel that they are not included. There are people who have reservations and who are worried. We must listen to what they have to say. We must listen to those Canadians.

As a woman, I am concerned by the lack of progress made in certain fields. May I remind you that the United Nations puts Canada in first place among the countries of the world. We can be proud of this but do you know that based on the analysis on gender equality, Canada only comes in eighth place. This is unacceptable.

[*English*]

The issue of gender equality in the Senate is one which has caused a great deal of controversy in some quarters. The idea has been attacked as anti-democratic. While I do not believe that, I do believe we have the opportunity to make changes in our institutions which recognize not just regional equality but to expand that definition of equality to gender equality. I want to say I am pleased that four of the premiers have made a commitment to that principle.

I hope we will begin to look at this country in terms of wanting to make sure that our institutions reflect the reality of Canada, the reality of 52 per cent of this population, the women in this country. I will continue to push for gender equality in the Senate. As I have said, I