

Mr. Jack Shields (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) probably outlined more graphically exactly what happened with Bill C-31. I listened with a great deal of interest to what she had to say. She said that she had travelled with the equality task force, had listened to women's groups, and that she thought it was unacceptable to most women. My whole point is that Bill C-31 is not just a women's issue. Women have been discriminated against in the past under the Indian Act. The Indian Act is a federal government Act. It was not imposed by the Indian people themselves. That is the point. Our predecessors in the House of Commons passed an Indian Act which discriminated against those women. I abhor the thought that my colleagues of 30 or 40 years ago would have agreed that that was the proper thing to do. Indian people were discriminated against, absolutely. However, they have developed a collective system of Government. For the first time in the history of this country, we are now saying to Indian people that we cannot trust them to run their own affairs and that therefore we will impose membership upon them. We are telling them that we will right the wrong which we know has been done to Indian women. We are not going to compensate; we are going to impose those people back on them and they are the ones who will have to compensate. That is what we are doing.

We must understand the issue and what would happen if the Hon. Member's amendment were accepted. The way it reads now, we would have people influencing the electors, and the electors who are normally residents of the band would determine the membership code. I see nothing wrong with that; I see absolutely nothing wrong with that. If we had influence from the other side, what would happen in small bands where the people returning to the reserves outnumber those already there? The people living off the reserves could actually determine who would live on the reserves, in the collective. It just does not make sense to me that people living in Ottawa, in Montreal, perhaps as a neighbour of the Hon. Member in Mount Royal, or in the United States, should have a say in determining the membership code of a collective in northern Alberta, northern Saskatchewan or northern Ontario. It just does not make sense.

There is no protection for old members. What about band members who for years worked under discrimination, who could not vote or do the kinds of things we normally do? What about people living on reserves who had to go to a white Indian agent, perhaps from Mount Royal, Edmonton or Calgary, and ask for permission to leave the reserve to go into the Town of St. Paul to do some shopping, and the Indian agent would say that it was all right and give them a pass? That is the type of rule those Indian people lived under. They developed their own system of government. We are now saying that we will give them no protection, and that we will let people who have had no connection with the band or with their system of government come in and determine the membership codes.

In the Province of Alberta we have had Métis colonies, for example the Kikino Métis colony. A number of people have lived there all their lives. They were born there. They par-

icipated in ranching, farming and so on, and now they are living in this Métis colony. If we cause the Métis to be categorized as Indians, they are going to be kicked off the colony because the colony people have said treaty Indians cannot live on the colony.

● (1140)

We have done some terrible things here that none of us have really addressed because we are rushing this Bill. The way it is in the Bill, the electors must be at least ordinary residents on the reserve. This amendment that the Hon. Member from Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) is proposing would let anyone, with or without connection to the reserve, vote on membership rules. It would strip the historical community of control. It cedes to the newly created membership. It could devastate bands. It offends, in my view, the fundamental, basic issue, and that is, band control of band membership. The whole Bill offends that, but this amendment would clearly offend that.

I think that I have had my say on this one, Mr. Speaker, but I wanted to get those remarks on the record. The fundamental problem that we have is that although, with good intention, we have said that we have to do something to undo the wrong that was done to the women, unfortunately it has become a women's issue. I suggest that that is how the Hon. Member from Mount Royal was drawn into the whole debate, because she sees it as a woman's issue. I see it as discrimination to women; I see it as an injustice, but it is fundamentally an Indian issue; it is not a women's issue.

The issue is: are we truly going to allow the Indian people to develop their own system of Government, as we keep saying in this House of Commons that we are going to do? Are we going to do that, and when? Six months or a year from now are we going to come forward and say, Well, we have to do some more changing on the Indian Act before we turn over control of their lives to the Indian people?" Are we going to say, "Oh, gee, we did not recognize that all these people were going to want to become Indian again; we have to expand the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to accommodate all these new Indians we have created". That is what we are talking about in this House.

At what point in time are we going to say, "Enough is enough, let these people become full Canadians with every right that you and I have". They should not have to come running to Ottawa with a band council resolution to do something on their own reserve, to build a school, to build a damned privy out behind the community centre. That is what we are talking about. It is an Indian issue and we have forgotten that because we have allowed the women's groups right across the country to snowball this thing into a women's issue. I am sorry that the Hon. Member from Mount Royal has fallen into that trap.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) on a question of privilege.