

Adjournment Debate

I want to say again that this government is totally committed to support of agriculture and will assist whenever, wherever, however we can.

MEECH LAKE ACCORD

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Madam Speaker, on Thursday of last week my leader, the member for Yukon, the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville, and myself all urged the federal government to ensure the full participation of aboriginal peoples at the First Ministers' Conference in December during the discussion of the so-called Canada clause.

I said at that time,

—in view of the fact that an essential component of the Canada clause is the recognition of aboriginal peoples as distinct societies with distinct cultures and languages in this country, it is fundamentally unacceptable for First Ministers to sit around the table and discuss that issue without the participation of aboriginal peoples.

I called upon the Deputy Prime Minister to ensure that aboriginal peoples would, in fact, be at the table at the First Ministers' Conference in December. In his answer, the Deputy Prime Minister said that this would subvert the process. The Deputy Prime Minister talked about the leadership that the Prime Minister of Canada had displayed during the process of constitutional change.

This was the same Prime Minister who bragged in a display of breathtaking arrogance that he had manipulated the whole process. He said, "I told them when this thing was going to take place. I told them a month ago when we were going to start meeting. It's like an election campaign. You've got to work backward. You pick your dates and you work backward. And I said, that's the day I am going to roll the dice. It is the only way to handle it." Madam Speaker, that approach has been described eloquently by the Conservative member for Annapolis Valley—Hants as being "bluff, bluster and blackmail".

When the Prime Minister rolled the dice, when he played with the future of our country like a constitutional crapshoot, he forget one important element, one group of people who have historically been forgotten and betrayed in this country; the aboriginal people of Canada. In his cynical wheeling and dealing with the First Ministers at the Conference Centre, the Prime Minister

left aboriginal peoples feeling degraded and humiliated; reduced to the status of observers with their noses pressed up against the window of the Conference Centre.

It was not until the Leader of the New Democratic Party insisted some four days after the conference had started, that aboriginal people were even given a briefing by federal officials as to what was taking place inside the conference centre. It was not particularly surprising, when you look at the appalling record of this government when it comes to aboriginal peoples in this country.

The Canadian north is currently under massive assault from hydroelectric projects, oil and gas development and the military. I am thinking particularly of the assault on the Innu people of Labrador. Above all, there are the forestry companies. Subsidies for northern postal services have been slashed and education funding for native students has been effectively cut. This is happening at a time when a young native person has a better chance of going to prison than going to university.

Also, native communication funding has been slashed. Core funding to the Assembly of First Nations was eliminated. Organizational money for the James Bay Cree, B.C.'s Nishga, the Gitksan Wet'suwet'en and other vocal critics, was dropped; the Manitoba inquiry into aboriginal justice, the Marshall Inquiry and the Alberta inquiry into the Bloods has demonstrated that the justice system is steeped in racism.

Indeed, as a brief submitted by the Assembly of First Nations stated: "All of the institutions of our culture are under attack. Our languages are disappearing as our elders die. Our religions are disappearing with the spread of religions from other parts of the world. Our hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering lifestyles are disappearing with the wanton killing of animals, pollution, forestry clear cutting, encroachment upon wilderness areas and megaprojects all in the name of progress and development".

Given all of this, is it not surprising that aboriginal peoples are feeling betrayed by this process of constitutional change. It has left them out and they, and I, salute the courage, the dignity and the eloquence with which Manitoba Cree New Democrat MLA, Elijah Harper, has been forcing the Government of Canada, indeed, all