

*Questions*

It says that the proposals contained in the policy statement are to be discussed with Indian people, provincial governments and the Canadian public before any of them are implemented.

It says that provinces should extend the services to Indians that they extend to others who dwell within their domain and that the federal government will transfer funds to help them do it.

It says that representatives of the Indian people should be involved in discussions with the provinces.

It says that federal departments will do this concurrently with those provinces which agree.

It says that the Indian people should control their own land.

It says that those bands which want title to their land should be able to take it.

It says that if the provinces extend their services to Indians and other federal departments besides mine do likewise, the Department of Indian Affairs would be phased out of operation. After all, Indian Affairs has been attacked by everybody. Who could complain if the Government believed that the critics had meant what they said?

The Statement says that it hopes the phasing out could be done in five years. And this reference to five years applies ONLY to the phase-out process. It goes on to say that the matter of Indian control of Indian land will take longer. Among the numbers of years which are greater than five, there is wide range of choices. But everyone has fixed on five years, which is impossible. There are 550 bands. There are more than 2,000 reserves. An Indian Lands Act is necessary to protect the land. Such an Act will have to be talked about, consulted about, drafted, made into law and put into effect. In five years? Not at all. We know, and Indian people know, that this will take time.

The Statement said that the Treaties would be reviewed by the Indians and the Commissioner for Indian Claims to determine the best way of adjudicating claims arising from them.

The Statement said that the Government recognizes that all Canadians should acknowledge the virtues, strengths and richness of Indian culture and languages.

[Mr. Chrétien.]

The Statement said that the Government would develop, with the Indian people, programs to enrich their cultural heritage and their sense of identity.

How can these proposals be taken as an abrogation of Treaties? Do they sound like cultural genocide? I do not see how anyone can suggest that they are.

As soon as the policy proposal was made public, there were headlines about "turning the Indians over to the provinces".

Shortly after the headlines, there were editorials about the problems involved in doing that which was never suggested should be done.

At the same time some Indian leaders began telling the government it ought not to do that which many of them had sought for years.

What is needed now is a sensible and meaningful discussion about the steps to be taken and to separate the principal components of the problem so that they can be dealt with one after another, or jointly where possible.

We want to talk. We want to have a dialogue with Indian spokesmen and we want the provinces to join in the talks.

I can well appreciate the reaction of Indian people towards the policy proposals. The proposals represent a dramatic break with the past. Spokesmen for the Indian people have asked for time to consider the proposals and to draft alternative proposals of their own. This is a reasonable position to take.

Indian people, because of past experiences, have a deep distrust of governments, both federal and provincial, and tend to regard the proposals with suspicion. In private meetings with representatives of the Indian people I have explained the policy proposals, and I have listened to their comments and criticisms. These meetings have been helpful and many more will be held.

There is room for disagreement about what is to be done. There is room for a great deal of discussion before anything is done.

There is no room for rejecting out of hand that which was never proposed at all.

Last year a series of meetings with spokesmen for each band of Indian people were held. It soon became apparent that the Indian Act, as such was not the first priority of many Indian people. It also soon became apparent that the restrictions imposed by the present Act had outlived their usefulness. It was clear