

*Indian Act*

understand what he is doing, Mr. Speaker, through you, to the Indian people of this country? We did it once with the Indian Act. For God's sake let us not do it again. Let us get some sense in this Bill, even if it comes at the last minute. Amend the Bill now. The Minister can withdraw the Bill and bring it back. He could remove the discrimination clauses. Everybody wants that. I say to him not to impose on the Indian people in those bands retroactive reinstatement. For once let us speak with a straight tongue and tell them: "Look, you people, you can govern yourselves. We will compensate if there is compensation to be made". Or we could say: "We will guarantee that those moneys will be paid into the band funds if there is a drain on them". We could do all sorts of things.

I do hope Members will stand in this House and speak on this Bill. I do hope they will stand and make their presence felt in this House. It will be a travesty if we allow this Bill to pass. We will regret it. We will be looking back in 20 years, nay, in ten years, and we will be saying what fools we were.

**Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively to the remarks of the Hon. Member for Athabasca (Mr. Shields). I know of the sincerity, compassion and conviction with which he spoke. Everyone in the House could detect that. I hope he does not have to tell the House that he spoke with the same compassion and vigour in his own caucus when the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) was there. I hope he tried to convince her of the sentiments which he feels so deeply. I want to read—

● (1450)

**Mr. Shields:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I should like to answer that question. I have met with the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald)—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Herbert):** Order, please. A point of order is not permission to answer a question.

**Mr. Munro (Hamilton East):** Mr. Speaker, I was not asking a question. I was expressing a hope. I thought the Hon. Member might launch into another speech. However, I should like to point out to him what the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) said recently. She said:

The issue we must address, first and foremost, is equality—the equality of women and men everywhere in Canada. For years, individuals and organizations, national and international, have pointed to the discriminatory clauses of the Indian Act—

Then she went on to say:

Today we have a chance to correct the wrongs perpetrated against Indian women by an Act of the Canadian Parliament for over 100 years. To do so must surely mean that Indian women—all Indian women—must have the same rights, privileges and responsibilities as those now enjoyed by Indian men—

I hope the Hon. Member for Athabasca remains here to hear my comments. She continued:

—including the right to full membership within their band and residency on their reserve for those who have lost their status, should they so desire it.

Then she went on to say:

It is not enough merely to remove the discriminatory clauses of the Indian Act. Full reinstatement to their bands must be a complementary move unless thousands of women and their children are to be left in a state of limbo.

That is not much choice for the bands to determine their own membership. So much for this type of position.

I do not doubt the sincerity of the Hon. Member for Athabasca. Who could? That is the conundrum in which all of us in the House find ourselves. This is why there is unanimous consent to proceed today.

There are those who say, like the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands, that we must guarantee them membership, that we must reinstate those who have lost their status and that nothing less will do. We have people who feel strongly about this in the New Democratic Party, as indeed we do on this side of the House. Of course we have others who deal on an ongoing basis with Indian people. They are the ones who have heard the fears of Indian people week in and week out, month in and month out, about our tackling this particular problem. They tried to resolve the internal conflict within their own consciences. They tried to resolve the political conflict within their Parties as to the urgency of the situation. That is where the conflict is. Then I think they tried to paper it over, quite frankly, with some rather fragile arguments such as: "We regret that we are being forced to do this and are being rushed".

We have talked a lot about this matter. We set up a special standing committee of the House of Commons to look into the matter. It heard many witnesses and made a report. By the way, on that committee were representatives of the native people. That parliamentary report was made under the chairmanship of the Hon. Member for London West (Mr. Burghardt). It was an all-Party committee which made a series of recommendations. If the Government had departed substantially from the terms of the Bill, we would have been accused of irresponsibility because we would have fractured the unanimous and bipartisan atmosphere in which the report was created. There was all-Party support for the report. We brought in recommendations which were almost dead-on the ones contained in the report of the parliamentary committee.

Now we are being told how unfortunate it is to rush the matter through the House. If we had come in with something substantially different from the parliamentary report, I know what we would have heard on the floor of the House. One does not require a vivid imagination to know what Hon. Members would have said. They would have reminded us that the parliamentary committee studied the matter, that it heard witnesses and made recommendations. They would have called us an arrogant government and have indicated that we departed substantially from the all-Party report. They would have asked: "What right do you have to do that? What arrogance! Don't you care?"

To accuse the Government of paternalism in a situation such as this against such a background is shameful. Surely people who argue that should be ashamed when they know the origins and that it was an all-Party report.