

and leaning on the provinces, he gave in to the position of the provinces and tried to convince the aboriginal organizations to accept what the provinces wanted in order to get an agreement so that the conference would be successful and the Prime Minister and the Government would look good. I believe that was wrong. It was a case of doing what was expedient rather than doing what was correct. The conference was a failure. It did not achieve agreement and it did not end with the goodwill which it had when it started.

● (1500)

With respect to the leaked report of the Nielsen review committee, or as it is called "The Buffalo Jump of the 1980s", the Minister has just said that those of us in the Opposition who are familiar with the Cabinet system should understand that nothing is government policy until it is finally approved by the Government, and that this was probably one of many documents which was put forward but discarded, remade or whatever. He said that since it was not finally approved, it is not the policy of the Government. He said he did not approve it himself. That may be true, Mr. Speaker, but I served in Cabinet for seven years and I know that the very fact that a document like this got as far as it did, with so much support from various Departments, and that there are so many people within the structures of the Canadian Government who would support this type of document and these types of proposals, is a shocking and shameful thing. I feel that if the document had not been leaked, we would not have had a chance to raise this publicly before it went to Cabinet for final approval and it might well have been approved at least in part. So I think the Opposition did its job in raising this document at the time it did because it cut off at the pass the initiatives of those people in the Government of Canada—perhaps not the Minister—who wanted that kind of policy with respect to Indian people.

When we look at the composition of the task force set up by the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Nielsen), we find it included people who, as far as I can see, had no understanding or knowledge of Indian matters. There were no Indians invited to participate in that task force. It certainly was a complete violation of the bilateral process which was set up a few years ago and which was supposed to be the *modus operandi* between the Government of Canada and the aboriginal peoples. There was no bilateral process. And the principal criterion of the people who worked on that task force seemed to be financial savings. There was no human consideration and no social or economic criterion applied.

The question was just asked of the Minister if he had anything to do with the instructions to the task force before it started its work. He said he did not. I find that a surprising admission. Here we have a task force which is dealing with the survival of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and which is given instructions to examine that Department and make suggestions, but the Minister responsible is not even consulted on what the very basic criteria for the operation of that task force should be. In answering the question he said that it goes to show how open a Government it is. That may be so, but it is the type of thing which does lead

to the confusion which is referred to in the motion before the House.

Supply

I would like to spend a few minutes speaking about the bilateral process. The bilateral process was started a few years ago by the former Government. It was something which it did not agree to immediately, but about which it was finally convinced. It was a process which was proposed by the Assembly of First Nations and other aboriginal groups, and the proposal was to the effect that changes in policy with respect to the aboriginal and Indian people of Canada should always be made nation to nation, Canadian Government to Indian nations, one on one. Nothing should be done in a unilateral way and then sprung on our native or aboriginal peoples. That was the process, Mr. Speaker, which was carried out at the time of the treaties. At that time the British Government, which preceded the Government of Canada, dealt with the different Indian nations in Canada as nations on a one-to-one basis and negotiated what the arrangements between the Crown and the Indians should be. But that approach disappeared with the passing of the Indian Act and the many other unilateral types of legislation which we have passed in this country over the last hundred years.

We have had in this Chamber hundreds of non-Indians, white men of various backgrounds, making laws which touched the very lives of these Indian people without even consulting with them. After coming to the conclusion that this was not the right way of doing things, we finally had a Government which agreed just a few years ago to the bilateral process. That bilateral process was followed to a great extent by the work of the Special Committee on Indian Self-Government. We had on that committee three representatives of the major native organizations in Canada. While they did not have a vote, they participated fully in the committee. No proposal was put to the committee without their comments, criticisms, and suggestions. Although they did not vote, their views on the various proposals were taken seriously by the members of the committee. I cannot recall members of the committee pushing ahead with any type of recommendation or proposal which was not supported by those three native representatives. We often had a long debate when there was a disagreement, but we worked it out in due course and a consensus was arrived at. That process was started with the Burghardt committee which dealt with Indian women and the Indian Act. I believe three representatives were invited in that case, but only two participated. That was an offshoot of the bilateral process between Canadian Governments and the Indian people.

For the last few weeks, several of us have participated in the discussions with respect to Bill C-31 which amends the Indian Act, especially with respect to Indian women and discrimination. Unfortunately, the way that Bill is being proceeded with is in contradiction to the bilateral process. We are sitting around in the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development with various Hon. Members putting amendments on the table, but there are no native representatives to give us their views with respect to those amendments, and in no way can we adjourn the committee continually in