

Incarceration of Native Persons

I believe Indian offences, as I mentioned before, mirror poor social and health conditions on the reserves. I do not believe there is any question about that. The high level of Indian juvenile delinquency, of young suicides, and the large number of children in care, suggest that deteriorated family and social conditions are having the greatest effect on Indian youth. The high representation of native people in jails and juvenile court also reflects the scarcity of preventive services and support systems for Indians as alternatives to jail.

A study was undertaken in 1979 regarding the issues affecting the total justice system, and the recommendations which were made were many and, I believe, very realistic. But those recommendations have not in fact been implemented. As I gathered from what the Parliamentary Secretary said earlier, the Government is still having conferences and debating what should be done and how it should be done. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that confidence has to be given back to the Indian people. The paternalism of the federal Government over hundreds of years must come to an end. In fact, our aboriginal people must take control of their own lives. As recently as Friday, a Bill was passed in this House, referred to as the Cree-Naskapi Act, which in fact gave the responsibilities for local government back to the Cree bands of northern Quebec and the Naskapi of Schefferville, where they belong. This came out of the James Bay Agreement which was reached in 1975. It has only taken the Cree, Naskapi and the federal Government eight years to negotiate the agreement which was passed through the House on Friday. Hopefully, it will receive Senate approval in the not too distant future and be proclaimed so that the Crees and the Naskapi can get on with governing their own affairs.

One of the things we discussed with respect to this Bill was the policing which would go on in these municipalities, these band areas, this 1300 square miles of land in northern Quebec. The Crees have their own police forces which have proved very successful. Of course I would like to see this type of self-government, and I am not suggesting for a moment that the particular model used by the Cree-Naskapi would be the model to be used elsewhere in Canada, but there are some very positive points in that legislation which could pertain to other areas of jurisdiction across this country. We have to encourage the Indian First Nations to assume the responsibility for administration of their own affairs. They should decide their own future rather than have to come cap in hand to Ottawa for every nickel and dime. They should not have to have some faceless bureaucrat in that tower in Hull tell them what they can do, when they can do it and where they can do it. We have taken away the pride of a very proud people. We have taken away their hope. We have taken away the glory that was once theirs. It must be returned, and when it is I am very confident that these horrifying statistics we read out today will change, and fairly dramatically so. We are going to see some very positive results. Indian political leadership today is as mature and capable as any leadership in this country, be it municipal, provincial or federal. Indian people are more than capable of administering their affairs. Of course I encourage the Government to come forward with enabling legislation to allow what

is referred to as Indian self-government, and to do it quickly. The Indian people are ready for it.

• (1750)

The Canadian people realize that something has to be done. After looking at these statistics no Canadian can fail to say that this should not happen. There should be more involvement by native people in our justice system. Some services should be specifically designed for native people. There should be more native para-professionals within the justice system to serve in a liaison capacity. We talked about understanding the traditions of the native way of life. The best way of doing that is by involving Indian people in the justice system.

I will conclude by thanking the Hon. Member for Broadview-Greenwood for bringing this motion forward. It allows us an opportunity to discuss some of the concerns we have about the aboriginal peoples in this country. Rather than condemn our justice system, which is a part of the problem, we should look at the broader problem of what is causing the people to turn to crime. That is the number one problem to be solved. We cannot do it piecemeal because it will not work piecemeal. For far too long this Government has done things on a band-aid basis. It keeps sticking one band-aid here, one there and another one over there. Well, it is not going to work any more. You cannot throw money at the problem, you have to solve it. We must show these people that we are not paying lip service to the problems, that in fact we mean business, and that we want the lot of the aboriginal peoples in this country improved.

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I have spent most of my life working for and with natives in northern Saskatchewan and northern Canada. I know that as these statistics we have seen today grow more and more ridiculous, there is less and less respect for the law among the native community. There is a need for the natives to make their own decisions. I want to read into the record a news release from the Native Council of Canada which talks about this question directly. It says:

We believe the time is ripe to adopt pro-active and positive policies now that will go beyond the negative social control policies of the past to establish a momentum for social growth. It is our contention that, if as much effort and vision were expended in preparing people for social, economic and employment opportunity as has been traditionally expended on singing out for punishment victims of deplorable social conditions, much could be done to correct this totally unacceptable situation.

It goes on to say much more, but it concludes with this:

One of the excuses given for inaction by responsible authorities is that these problems will work themselves out through the mechanisms of constitutional discussions and the advent of First Nations self-government. To date, most provinces have refused to consider a set principles upon which native people can build any sense of confidence in resolving any issue, including those in the area of the administration of justice.

It goes on to support this particular motion and says:

We want, however, to be assured of a commitment to change and to justice. Mere token involvement in a meaningless dialogue will not satisfy native people, nor we believe, Canadians in general.

I just wanted to put that on the record, Mr. Speaker.