

Supply

whatever may be required to convince the Quebec Liberal Premier to attend the conference? And, as you see it, what are the repercussions of Mr. Bourassa's absence at the conference?

[English]

Mr. Penner: First, Madam Speaker, let me say that the Hon. Member for Abitibi (Mr. St. Julien) has been far too generous in describing me as a defender of the aboriginal people. The aboriginal people do not need any defenders. Their own leaders are perfectly capable of doing that. My role simply is to work with legislators and Governments in the development of public policy and with non-native Canadians. The Hon. Member has been too generous. I like it, but it is not fair to the aboriginal leaders.

The Member's question about the participation of Premier Bourassa was asked by the Hon. Member for Brampton—Georgetown (Mr. McDermid) of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner). I thought it was a relevant and fair question. It is important that Quebec be there. Most important of all would be for Quebec to be a signatory to the Constitution and a full participant at all times. I, for one, hope that this will happen in the near future. Even though it has not happened yet, there is an important reason for Quebec to be at the conference table. As my hon. friend knows, there is aboriginal self-government now in effect in the Province of Quebec. The Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine Est will perhaps describe that later in his comments. I simply repeat what the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition said that, yes, the Premier of Quebec should be there. Quebec has much to contribute and without Quebec it will be a lesser conference than it could otherwise be.

Mr. Allmand: Madam Speaker, why does the Hon. Member think there is so much hesitancy on the part of provincial Governments in Canada and of the federal Government to accept completely the proposal for aboriginal self-government when after more than 100 years of governing them through the Indian Act and the Department of Indian Affairs we have made such a complete mess of things? For example, in a 1980 report it was pointed out that the life expectancy of Indian people was 10 years less than non-Indian people, that the infant mortality rate was 60 per cent higher than the national rate for all Canadians, that the unemployment rate ranged from 50 per cent to 90 per cent, that income was two-thirds of the national average, and that in 1977, less than 40 per cent of the Indian people had running water, sewage disposal or indoor plumbing and 19 per cent had two or more families in their homes.

Mr. McDermid: Who was the Minister during that time?

Mr. Allmand: With that kind of mess after 100 years of Government by many political Parties—

Miss MacDonald: You are absolutely right.

Mr. Allmand: What I am reading is from a report published in 1980, and I think it reflects on all of us.

Mr. McDermid: Especially former Ministers.

Mr. Allmand: No, it reflects on all Parties. I do not say this in a partisan way. I hope the Hon. Member does not understand me to say that. I am saying that on behalf of Liberals, Conservative and NDP Governments, and I meant to say it that way.

Miss MacDonald: I agree.

Mr. Allmand: If that is the case, why is there a hesitancy not to agree to Indian self-government with that kind of record?

Mr. Penner: Madam Speaker, I think the Hon. Member asks an extremely difficult question. We want to get now at the issue of motivation. What is it that motivates people either to block something or to do something? For what it is worth, and I can certainly be challenged on this by any Hon. Member and his or her answer would be as good as mine, I believe there exists among political leaders in Canada a fear of the consequences of sharing, on the one hand sharing wealth, and on the other hand, and probably more important, sharing power. It is an unknown. Entering into an unknown area can be very threatening, very challenging and very destabilizing.

I would simply say that, having been associated with aboriginal leaders for a very long period of time, I would think the quote, going back to the 1930s of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, would be appropriate, that really there is nothing to fear but fear itself. There is no fear in negotiating these agreements, Madam Speaker. What we require at this First Ministers' Conference and what we will all be watching for is whether those people who have been elected as Premiers of provinces and our own Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) have the kind of vision that Mr. Amagoalik referred to and which my friend, the Hon. Member for Cowichan—Malahat—The Islands mentioned. A need for vision is what is required to get over this obstacle of fear, of moving into what for many Governments in Canada will be a new area. I would encourage them to make a leap over that gap of fear and move into this new realm. It is very promising for our Confederation. The whole world is watching us expecting that we can get some answers for the indigenous people.

Ms. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, I could not help but think back to the time when we were all involved in the constitutional negotiations in one way or another and, as the Hon. Member was speaking so eloquently, I thought of two other areas of rights that were being negotiated at the same time, both of which came out quite differently. Can the Member explain to me and others why the difference? First, regarding the equality rights for women, there was no question that these were not contingent rights. Rights were established first and, after being clearly established, various programs are still being negotiated.

Second, with regard to linguistic rights, the right to two official languages was established clearly first, and then programs were established afterwards. There were fears