

Indian Affairs

placed. Moreover, such development cannot take place piecemeal, or by the government. It must be done in a comprehensive way, and we realize that Indian people must play the lead role. Opposition members would surely not have the House believe that Indian people should be dependent on the government in this regard. I am talking about involvement in these megaprojects. We are now consulting with Indian people to seek ways to improve the structure of financial support for Indian economic development ventures. Some meetings will take place with Indian leadership during the course of this week in which not only myself but the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Lalonde) will be involved. Our goal is to ensure that the sources of funding available to all Canadians are tapped to their fullest and that Indian economic development takes place within the existing economic structure of Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): I regret to interrupt the hon. minister but his allotted time has expired. He may continue only with the unanimous consent of the House. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Nielsen: The minister has not spoken on Indian affairs during this whole session, so I think he should be allowed the opportunity to do so now.

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): With that somewhat dubious observation, let me indicate that I appreciate the time to complete my remarks. I will be very brief.

I should like to emphasize the optimism which can be engendered by us all and to negate some of the more negative aspects emphasized so much over the years. I am referring to the land claims activity which is of prime concern to the native people of this country. I would advise the hon. member who put this motion of my appointment of Dennis O'Connor as chief federal negotiator for the Yukon claim. The hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) is well aware of that appointment.

Mr. Nielsen: It is a fine appointment.

Mr. Munro (Hamilton East): This appointment has received the approbation of the hon. member for the Yukon, the government of the Yukon and the Council of Yukon Indians. I saw him just yesterday and he told me that the negotiations with the Council of Yukon Indians are going reasonably well. Also I advise the member of my appointment of Senator David Steuart of Saskatchewan to try to bring to conclusion the agreement in principle, and of course I am referring to the COPE claim. Also in August Robert Mitchell was appointed to deal with the Inuit claim in the eastern Arctic, and Robert Young was appointed to deal with the Nishga Tribal Council land claim. These appointments have received not only the endorsement of the territorial government but of the provinces. The inactivity of some of these land claims has been an impediment to development and a source of irritation not only to the natives but to the non-native population who find that

little can be accomplished as long as these claims remain inactive.

Indeed that has been a very encouraging development. I appreciate the indulgence of the House in allowing me to point out some of the positive aspects of the fronts that are being moved on now in all these areas, to cope more adequately with the severe problems which historically native people have suffered. They are all primarily designed to provide, as identified in the motion, the Indian people of this country, Canada's first citizens, with the self-reliance that not only they want but we endorse.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

• (1650)

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg-St. James): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this motion since I think it clearly raises a question which is of great concern to us all, to all Canadians and all native people. I wish to say that while native and Indian people make up a very small percentage of the population, their problems are very real ones, in spite of improvements. It is not only the fact that native people face very real problems which is important but also the fact that the continued existence of these problems serves as a symbol to many people. It serves as a symbol of the incapacity of a nation to come to grips adequately with these problems. It symbolizes a government which fails to deal with problems effectively or adequately.

I wish to make some comments about the remarks made by the minister. He made reference to elected native people. I must say that the capacity of native people to become elected to legislatures across this country is important, but it is certainly not sufficient. The central question which faces the Indian and native peoples today is that of participation in the decision-making process as a community, not simply by way of having individuals elected to legislatures across the country.

The minister also made reference to the constitutional process. He detailed the involvement the native people have had so far in that process. I must say that while he was able to elaborate a large number of details, I think the fact of the constitutional express coming to town with a large number of Indian people, who still feel totally locked out of any real involvement in the constitutional process, indicates that the efforts so far to involve Indian people in that constitutional change process have been ineffective. It is not, however, too late. I think the recommendations before the committee could be responded to positively by the government. The government could still come forward with an amendment to the constitutional resolution which would affirm aboriginal and Indian rights rather than simply make a negative statement, as is in the present resolution. That statement says that nothing in the resolution will take away from aboriginal rights.

With regard to the minister's comments about the Indian Act, I must say that unless the general mood that is generated by the way the government is handling the constitutional process is reversed, and an appropriate and constructive mood