

Government Orders

I agree with the learned judge. I too favour the second approach. I am certain that members of the House would agree that the co-existence approach, based upon consultation and reconciliation, is the appropriate course. It is this government's course. It is the course preferred by the vast majority of Canadians and the vast majority of aboriginal people.

We have undergone a turbulent summer of protest and pain. Issues which have been left unresolved for decades have erupted into violence. Negotiation, not confrontation, resolves issues. This legislation provides the framework for these negotiations in B.C. If we do not negotiate, we leave the field to those who believe in the all or nothing approach. We leave the resolution to those who have little regard for the law.

• (1615)

The B.C. Treaty Commission establishes a solid foundation for consultation and reconciliation. It lies at the heart of the co-existence approach. This legislation confirms the creation of the B.C. Treaty Commission as an arm's length body with a mandate to ensure the three parties are adequately prepared for the negotiations.

Some members across the floor criticize the BCTC because they maintain it will concede too much to First Nations. They monger fear and misunderstanding by removing facts from the context. How many times on radio shows and at town hall meetings have they used the process of negotiations to instil suspicion and resentment in the hearts of British Columbians? How many times over the past few months have we heard that the First Nations of British Columbia claim 110 per cent of the province?

The hon. members who raise these issues ought to know better. They know the claims overlap. They know they are simply opening positions that take into account the history of the various First Nations. They know the final solutions of these settlements will be very different from the opening positions. Yet they persist in stirring up fear and misunderstanding by repeating the 110 per cent figure as though it were an outrageous demand upon the common sense of the people of British Columbia. They claim the Government of Canada is ignoring other interests affecting negotiations. They spread misinformation.

These hon. members are the kinds of people who themselves favour an all or nothing approach. They do not espouse the same cause as those described by Judge Macfarlane, the view that aboriginal people have exclusive ownership, but their philosophy is the same, all or nothing. They have no patience for reconciliation or consultation. Their approach will lead us inevitably to the confrontation and lawlessness that we witnessed in British Columbia over the past few months.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Irwin: Mr. Speaker, I see I have their attention now.

The role of the commission is to facilitate, not negotiate modern day treaties. Its main functions are to assess the readiness of the parties to begin negotiations, allocate and negotiate funding to aboriginal groups, assist parties to obtain dispute resolution services at the request of all parties, and monitor and report on the status of negotiations.

This House will be pleased to hear that 47 First Nations groups are involved with the BCTC process. They represent over 70 per cent of the B.C. First Nations. Two First Nations, the Teslin and the Gitanyow, are about to complete the third stage of the negotiation process. Their framework agreements have been initialled by negotiators and I hope to be in a position to sign these agreements soon. Soon they will begin negotiating an agreement in principle.

I have also had occasion to sign the Sechelt, the Gitksan, the Wet'suwet'en, and the Champagne Aishihik transboundary claim framework agreements. This is significant progress and I would like to thank the negotiators for all parties for making it possible.

We are well down the road of consultation and reconciliation that provides the foundation for a coexistence approach to settlement of land claims. I want to make one issue very clear, particularly to those members across the floor who would stir up misinformation and distrust. Our approach of consultation, reconciliation, and coexistence applies to all interested groups in British Columbia, not just the three parties at the negotiating table. Many different groups, organizations, and individuals have a major stake in how the land claim settlements are resolved. We are dealing after all with land and resources that provide the livelihood of British Columbians from many walks of life in all regions of the province.

All British Columbians will benefit from seeing these long-standing issues resolved. The negotiations will remove the uncertainty that has held back development. Resolution opens the doors to new investment and jobs in the province.

• (1620)

To ensure the negotiating process remains accessible to the public the openness protocol is negotiated for each treaty negotiation. A typical protocol will list specific measures the federal and provincial governments or the First Nations must take to an open and productive treaty process. These protocols keep the community and the media informed about what is happening at the negotiating table.

As of June 15, 11 negotiations have completed the openness protocols. For the negotiations to be fair the voices of all interested British Columbians must be heard. We have launched a province-wide consultation process to advise both the federal