

*Government Orders*

It is a particular pleasure for me to do this because as Minister of Indian Affairs in 1976-77 I was involved in the original negotiations with respect to these matters. At that time the claim made by the Council of Yukon Indians was entitled "Together Today for our Children Tomorrow" and was presented by Elijah Smith, an outstanding leader with the Yukon Indians. Soon afterwards I dealt with the new president of the Yukon Indians who was known as Daniel Johnson.

I supported this claim at that time which is a long time ago and I am pleased today after many ups and downs that it is finally settled and being ratified at this time by the House of Commons. I should point out that part of the delay over these many years has been due to the fact that the Yukon Indians to their credit not only put forward land claims in the traditional way but also wished to have aboriginal self-government as part of their claim and that held up the negotiations for many years.

It is also interesting to note that some of the people who were active with the Council of Yukon Indians back in 1976-77 when I was negotiating with it are still active today. I saw in the balcony last night people such as David Joe, Harry Allen and Vic Mitander. I must congratulate them all, along with Judy Gingell, the new chairperson of the Council for Yukon Indians, for their tenacity and their commitment to their claim and for having stuck with it over the years despite some very tough negotiating situations.

• (1810)

It is interesting to note that when we started the process back in the seventies very few Canadians understood and supported what we are doing here today. There was very little understanding and support for aboriginal land claims and especially for aboriginal self-government. However over the years there has been great progress and great advance in public education to the extent where today there is overwhelming support for these claims.

A certain amount of the success in advancing this public education was due to the aboriginal nations and to the work of the special committee on Indian self-government in the 1980s under Keith Penner, a former member from northern Ontario. I was also a member of that committee. The process that led up to the Charlottetown accord included provisions for aboriginal self-government which by that time had achieved a great deal of support among Canadians. Despite the fact that the Charlottetown accord was rejected by Canadians, the clauses with respect to aboriginal self-government had a lot of support.

As Canadians we have come a long way in understanding and supporting aboriginal self-government. Unfortunately that support is not yet unanimous. I am sad to say that we still have in the House a number of members, those in the Reform Party, and others in the country who still do not seem to understand this important concept and who still bring up the old myths and

stereotypes with respect to aboriginal people. I ask these members with great sincerity to take a new look at it. There is still time for them to vote in support of this very important measure.

We must remember that the aboriginal nations in Canada and in North America generally were here for thousands of years before the Europeans came. In that time they had their own lands, their own governments, their own languages, their own cultures, their own laws and their own economies. They were nations and they lived on the lands we now occupy.

When most of us as Europeans—and some of us came from other lands—first came here the aboriginal people thought they were sharing the land with us. They certainly were not transferring it to us. They never agreed to give up their rights and their sovereignty with respect to these lands, their cultures, traditions, governments and so on. Regretfully our people, the descendants of the Europeans, gradually took it away from them.

It is only justice that today and in other land claim settlements and through the treaties these demands have finally been recognized, that these rights are finally recognized, and that we have agreed to settle with these nations as we are doing today with the Yukon First Nations.

We are now on the third and final reading of Bill C-34 which is the Yukon First Nations self-government act. The self-government agreements to which this legislation pertains are in many respects the most complex self-government arrangements we have ever attempted in the country. For one thing they are unique in that they are the first such agreements tied in directly with a comprehensive land claim agreement that is ratified at the same time.

• (1815)

This legislation will be passed together with the Yukon land claims settlements act, Bill C-33. That means the administration of both the claims and self-government aspects will begin simultaneously in these First Nations that have signed self-government agreements.

It is also the first self-government legislation to cover all the First Nations within a single province or territory. Previous self-government arrangements have been made with a single band such as with the Sechelt band of British Columbia, or with a regional group such as was the case with the Cree and Naskapi in northern Quebec.

The Yukon settlement, which was initiated by the Council of Yukon Indians, covers the vast majority of aboriginal people in the territory. It includes almost a quarter of Yukon's total population.

The legislation is also the first self-government legislation to include several different aboriginal cultures and communities under a single piece of legislation. Yukon has some seven distinct native language groups. There are 16 communities in