

Indian Act

if they lost them after that time, they will be reinstated. How do you think that will stand up to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms? If the Government is to allow reinstatement retroactively to the 1950s, it had better do so back to the time when the Indian Act first came into force. How many people will come forward then?

The sad fact is that this very question about removing the discriminatory clauses has been discussed in the House and in the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development for the past four years. It makes me question why the Minister brought this Bill in, got unanimous consent to take it to the committee for study, in three days had the amendments moved, brought them back and rushed them through the House in order to have the Bill passed in the House of Commons. It is political. The Minister knows that it is political. The Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mrs. Erola) knows that it is political because she had stated in the House that if the Bill is not passed she will resign her seat. I do not think she would do so.

● (1440)

There is a fundamental injustice being done to the Indian people. This will go down as a very sad day, tantamount to the sadness that we should look upon the day the Indian Act was just passed, forever putting Indian people in a paternalistic situation. They cannot do anything without the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development saying: "Yes, you can do it". This at one time forced Indians to stay on the reserves. They could not even leave the reserve without a pass from the Indian agent. The Minister of Indian Affairs is saying to the Indian people: "We want you to govern yourselves. We want you to take part in society, so we are going to introduce a self-government or an Indian government Bill", as he did. But then the Government brings in a Bill like this that negates everything the Minister said two days ago on the Indian self-government Bill.

I would like to commend the Minister for introducing that Bill but I cannot commend him for introducing this one. We are doing something fundamentally wrong. Why will the House of Commons not take the responsibility that is rightfully and morally ours? Why can we not grapple with the situation, and come to a conclusion? We have no right to force membership in those Indian bands. We have no right to do that. They did not create the law that discriminated against the women; we did so in this House of Commons. We do not have the right to force band membership on the bands across the country when out of the other side of our mouths we say: "We want you to have Indian self-government."

I agree it was a terrible situation when women were discriminated against. How do you compensate them? I do not know. We are intelligent people in this House. We should be able to come to a solution. How do you compensate the women who decided 40 years ago not to get married, but would live common law against their religion because they did not want to lose their Indian status? Let me ask the Hon. Member for Broadview-Greenwood (Ms. McDonald), how do you compensate a woman who says: "I am not going to get married. I will

live common law even though it is against my religion and against everything I stand for because I do not want to lose my Indian status and I do not want my children to lose it"?

I have attended weddings and I have seen Indian people in their sixties finally getting married because their children had grown up and established that they were treaty Indians. My God, what have we done to those people? And we are doing it again today. I cannot for the life of me fathom why we would force this Bill on the Indian people of this nation. We say continually that we want them to be citizens of this country and take full part in it. But, dammit, we are not allowing them to do this when we force the bands to take God knows how many people back into the reserves. You are killing the Indian people with this legislation, just as you killed them in spirit and in drive when you brought in the first Indian Act which said, "We in this House of Commons and we in this Government are going to look after you. Do not worry".

I say to the Minister: Come to my riding and see what has happened to the young children in some of the reserves because of their dependence on welfare, their lack of health and the fact that they cannot make a decision without having to come to Ottawa to the Minister of Indian Affairs. It sickens me to think that intelligent people in this House of Commons have passed that legislation the way it is. We should be removing the discrimination clauses. There is no doubt about that. The Indian people want that; they have been asking for it. But we have to take it that other step further, that one more step that says: "Well, we really know everything that is good for you people. We are going to reinstate all these women and children and put them on your band list." We will put them on a general list first and we will put them on the band list at the same time because we cannot create two types of Indians.

Let me say to the Minister, today, mark my words, you are destroying the self-reliance, the resourcefulness and the development of Indians who have pulled themselves out of the quagmire by their bootstraps, out of the continual welfare system, and you are imposing on them again something as terrible as the Indian Act.

I implore Members in this House of Commons to talk. I implore the NDP members and my colleagues on this side to talk on this Bill until four o'clock this afternoon and let it die. Give it some thought. Give it some understanding. Let the Indian people sit down and tell you so you can understand what is happening. Why are we going through this Bill in 48 hours? The Minister brings in amendments to the Indian Act that include reinstatement. Why? We did that before through Bill C-169. Do you remember that, Mr. Speaker? Do you remember what happened with Bill C-169? Every one of us looked like a fools because we passed the Bill which infringed on freedom of speech—

Mr. Cullen: Nonsense.

Mr. Shields: The Hon. Member may say "nonsense". Let him say "nonsense" about this Bill. I would like to hear what the Hon. Member has to say about Bill C-147. Does he