

Sechelt Indian Band Self-Government Act

• (1710)

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank all Hon. Members of the House from all Parties for their consideration in allowing us to proceed with this Bill and the second Bill later on today and, given the constraint of time, I would simply like to make one or two remarks. I would like to indicate that this Bill is notable for a number of reasons. First, it is notable because it has the agreement of the federal Government, the Province of British Columbia and all political Parties in this House. Indeed, even more significantly, it has the consent of all federal Departments in Ottawa. It is no mean task to achieve all of that in this country with so many varied opinions and views. I might say that the credit for all of that goes to the people of Sechelt. They have kept the negotiations going at every turn of the road when it looked as if they were going to be frustrated. I was with them recently, as was the standing committee. If we have any sense of the feeling of what this Bill means, it is from listening to what the Sechelt community has to say. They have a big banner and T-shirts. On the T-shirt it says: "C-93 will make us free". It is a small event in many ways but it speaks volumes about the ability of this House and this system of Government to move forward in a way which fits a very small number of people of very ancient heritage.

I want to conclude by simply saying, thanks a lot to the House and thanks a lot to the people who put it together, particularly, the Sechelt people.

Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, I will speak only briefly on Bill C-93 and indicate, as the Minister himself implied, that in a national sense, perhaps in terms of the recommendations of the Committee on Indian Self-Government, in terms of constitutional recognition of aboriginal rights and the definition of those rights, including that of self-determination, we would have to say that the Sechelt Bill is one small step in the right direction towards aboriginal self-government. I think all Hon. Members know that no longer are we speaking in the realm of theory. We are now talking in a real world. Most of us will see self-determination for aboriginal people become a significant reality in Canada within our own lifetime. As the Minister so well said, for the people of Sechelt this is a major leap forward. I was there recently with members of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. The feeling and spirit of the community was one which really should be experienced by all Hon. Members. If we believe in Indian First Nation autonomy, if we accept the fact of diversity in the Indian community, and we really have no choice in that regard, then we certainly have to accede to the wishes of the Sechelt Indian people. They have hoped much and have worked very hard. The Bill we are passing this afternoon incorporates what they want, not what someone else wants. They collaborated in the drafting of this legislation, which is certainly a monument to Chief Dixon, to his advisers and to the people he leads.

The Minister knows I have some lingering concerns about the Bill. I wish the funding provisions were stronger. They rely

to a significant extent upon the good faith of Government and we just hope that that good faith will be evident. I wish the Government of British Columbia had been willing to leave the Sechelt lands unencumbered. I wish the resource control legislation on the lands which will go to them in fee simple had been lifted. Chief Dixon knows of these concerns and we hope there will be that kind of response from the Government of British Columbia.

I will conclude by saying that when we were in Sechelt, Chief Dixon reminded us that we live in the real world, not a world we would structure if we could, not an ideal existence we would plan for ourselves. So my best wishes today are for Chief Dixon and his people. I am convinced that the people of Sechelt with this Bill will build a much better world for themselves. I commend them for what they have done and I commend the Minister for his co-operation in helping this come into being in a relatively short period of time.

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox—Powell River): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to lend my voice to the kind of atmosphere of co-operation in this House today and thank the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Crombie) and Hon. Members of the Liberal Party for bringing together their efforts today to pass this piece of legislation. I think it demonstrates the kind of co-operation we can obtain in a legislature. We often see conflicts arise in the House and those are the things which are highlighted in the public eye. Today has been the culmination of an act of co-operation in which Hon. Members of the House developed the wishes of a group of people who live in British Columbia, the Sechelt people.

It has been a long and difficult task. It was not put in place over a short period of time. The task took something in the order of 15 years after it became apparent that the band could not live under the Indian Act, that it could not grow and develop in the way the Sechelt people desired. At that time they began to struggle and look for solutions. It was a task which was begun well before the present Chief and Council were in place. Previous councils of the Sechelt people began the concept, developed it and passed it on to the next council which developed it even further. I think Chief Dixon and his Council must be very proud today to have put in place a historic piece of legislation. It is legislation in which the Sechelt people are free of the Indian Act. They are free now to set out on the course of social and economic development which I am sure will be a glowing success.

The Sechelt people make it very plain that this is only one step. They are now free of the Indian Act. Certainly there are many problems and challenges which face them from here on in, but they have succeeded after 15 years of planning in getting this particular legislation in place, and we have not seen the last of the Sechelt people and their representatives. They will move on with other Indian people in this country to build the kind of place in Canadian society that they wish and we wish for them. I would like again to congratulate Hon. Members of the House, the Sechelt Council and Chief Dixon,