

*Government Orders*

The words inherent right and self-government to us have always been accepted as they are without trying to put them in a little box the way people quite often like to do. It is asked, is this the way it is going to be? Some people would say there is no other way when in fact there could be 10 different ways to do the same thing.

Would the member care to elaborate on her understanding of what is meant by self-government or inherent right? As far as we are concerned, it is the fact that we were here, we had a system in place. The Government of Canada and through it the Canadian people at large must acknowledge that we have the right to determine our future. We have that right to set up a self-government within our geographic areas without necessarily having to ask permission from a government that has been around for 125 years or so.

I wonder if the member would care to elaborate.

• (1325)

**Ms. Torsney:** Mr. Speaker, as the parliamentary secretary has outlined a number of principles related to self-government, I will identify some of the key principles that I think my constituents would be interested in and those that perhaps are a little greyer to some people than they should be.

Aboriginal self-government will operate within the existing Constitution. It is an important tool which will allow our aboriginal peoples the ability to make a lot of the key decisions which they need to make for themselves. Sometimes it is not appropriate for the federal government or the provincial governments to make all the decisions for this diverse group of communities which have very specific needs and problems that have either been neglected or that government policies at the provincial and federal levels in the past have tried to ameliorate but have only served to exacerbate because we tried this one size fits all philosophy.

The aboriginal peoples in the communities across Canada, particularly in B.C., need to be able to use their inherent rights to make the decisions within the context of the Canadian Constitution that will benefit their communities and see them empowered.

It is ironic that around the world people are recognizing the rights of empowerment of women, empowerment of individuals to make decisions, to have the tools to ensure they will be productive members of our communities so that we are more economically viable, we are more environmentally friendly and we take care of our population issues. All too often people within our own country do not recognize the importance of those values when it comes to a very specific group of people, the first people of Canada, the aboriginal peoples. Whether it was 30,000

years ago or more, they still were definitely our first peoples and we must give them the tools.

Another aspect, which seems to me to be common sense, but of course common sense is all too often not very common, is that the current system under which we have been operating has not worked. We have seen aspects of the aboriginal communities doing very well. I do not mean to draw from their success, whether it be in the arts, in business or in other areas of our communities. The aboriginal peoples have done very well in many aspects.

However, there are too many problems. There are too many young aboriginal people in jail. There are too many aboriginals who are dropping out of school, who do not seem to feel a part of Canadian society. It is incumbent on us to do everything we can to give them the tools so that they can be the best people that they can be.

This bill, this new approach to things, given that it was preceded with after 18 months of consultations with the communities and with our provincial and territorial partners, has given us the answers and the policy decisions that they would like to see in here. It will be successful and it will make a huge difference in the lives of many Canadians, particularly our young aboriginal Canadians, to whom we must leave a good legacy.

**Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I am one of the first to support self-government at a local level within the context of Canada being the nation. Not only do I talk about it; I have worked hard to implement it.

I have a concern which I would like the hon. member opposite to address. How do we deal with the aboriginal communities who see inherent self-government as being separate and apart from Canada? They see the right of inherent self-government as a separate and distinct nation from that of Canada. How will we deal with those aboriginal communities which see inherent government as being separate from the Government of Canada?

**Ms. Torsney:** Mr. Speaker, certainly this is a process which is evolving. I am pleased to have her support for the concept and for this bill in terms of self-government.

There will be a series of negotiations, but I have outlined already the basic principles on which we are proceeding. It must be within the context of the Constitution. We must ensure the structures are appropriate on the issues they have decision making power on and it is all outlined in the bill and in the process we are going forward with.

**The Deputy Speaker:** It being 1.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.