

House of Commons. It was worked out over a very long period of time, clause by clause, with government officials and officials of the Cree-Naskapi peoples. When the Bill came before the House, we knew that what we were doing was ratifying the agreement. That is the way we must proceed at all times in the future.

Another example would be the agreement which was reached with the Committee for Original Peoples Entitlement, the so-called COPE Agreement, and the people who live in the Mackenzie Delta and the Beaufort Sea area of northern Canada.

Through the various stages of Bill C-31—and it has been a lengthy and difficult exercise—we thought we were allowing some room for consultation. I have nothing but praise for the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Hon. Member for Wetaskiwin. He did everything he could to accommodate as many witnesses as possible. I have only praise for his work and his leadership in that committee. However, the kind of consultation we have is not the same as negotiation leading to agreement. This is why in the Indian community of Canada “consultation” is a stained word, a word which we can hardly use, a word which has become suspect.

When Bill C-31 has been passed, we will have driven out, if I can use such language, an unclean spirit from the Indian Act. That unclean spirit is sex discrimination. St. Luke's Gospel tells us what these unclean spirits do when they are driven out. According to St. Luke, they tend to pass through waterless places seeking rest but they find none. Then they return to their place of origin and find that everything is swept and in order, at which point they say: “Oh, look how everything is clean and orderly”, and invite in seven of their friends. That is a very unusual mid-eastern biblical way to describe a problem of today. What St. Luke is saying, very simply in modern language, is that depending on how we proceed to solve problems, the end result may prove to be a state which is worse than the original situation. I hope I did not lose you on that, Mr. Speaker.

Let me deal with it from another point of view. In my first year as a Member of Parliament, I met in the corridor upstairs a Cabinet Minister whom I greatly respected. He supposed that I had come down here to solve the problems of my constituents and of Canadians in general. I told him that that was my hope, and he gave me a word of advice. He said: “You will probably discover at the end of your career, whenever that is, that for every problem you solved or attempted to solve, in all likelihood you have created seven more”. I thought of that when I read in the newspaper this morning about an Indian woman who had lost her status through marriage and was reported to have said that it was unfortunate that the discriminatory provisions and the Government's attempt to correct them have caused hostility and deep divisions within Indian communities. Then she went on to say: “We are all victims of a very bad law, and it is going to take 10 years of healing”.

Indian Act

I believe deeply and passionately that our colonizing measures and attempts to deal with Indian people must end. The policies of termination, assimilation and mainstreaming must halt. It is time to recognize fully and unequivocally, without any hesitation, the right of Indian people to self-government, to govern with the consent of their own people and to govern being responsible to their own people. We want them to participate in Confederation; we want them to be partners in Confederation. They have been kept out from the beginning. We want them to participate, but their participation in our Confederation, as I emphasized earlier, should be by way of negotiation leading to agreement. Let us honour those agreements when we make them. Let us not hedge, fudge, legalize, squirm and wiggle our way out. Let us make honest and good agreements and stand by them. That is the way Indian First Nations and Indian people want to participate in our Confederation.

In any event, we must proceed on the basis of Government to Government. That may sound a little incongruous because we are talking about our Government, which is big and powerful, in comparison with many Governments of Indian First Nations, which are small, but surely that is not an argument against dealing Government to Government. After all, we do not hesitate to go to Washington, to Moscow or to any other nation much larger than our own, to deal Government to Government for the benefit of our people and their people at the same time. That is the way in which we must proceed.

• (1600)

When we recognize that Indian self-government is the only way that we can proceed in living together with the Indian people of this country, then we have to recognize at the same time that the right to control their own membership is an essential aspect of Indian self-government. It is a cornerstone of Indian self-government; it is the underpinning of self-government. If you cannot control your own membership then what does self-government mean?

The process whereby we decide who is and who is not an Indian must cease. We cannot go on categorizing Indian people into all these various divisions, arrangements and a range and varieties of groups and sub-groups. When one thinks about it, does it not offend one's sense of human rights to do this to the first citizens of Canada, to divide them up into all these groups as if they were exhibits in a zoo, to put them in these categories with a title of status or non-status, in all of these various divisions that I mentioned earlier? It is repugnant; it violates my sense of human rights, and I am sure the other Hon. Members of this House feel the same way. The constant meddling and interfering in the internal matters of Indian First Nations must stop, and it must stop now.

Let me say, for the benefit of Members who may think otherwise, that those who within the Indian community oppose this Bill are not opposing it because they want to see sex discrimination continue; on the contrary. Within the Indian community there is opposition to this Bill because they see it