

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***BRITISH COLUMBIA TREATY COMMISSION ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-107, an act respecting the establishment of the British Columbia Treaty Commission, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Jack Iyerak Anawak (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before question period I was pointing out some of the contradictions of the party opposite in terms of its aboriginal affairs policy. I was referring to the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville, who has made some contradictory and naive observations regarding the hardships aboriginal people in British Columbia and all across Canada have faced over the last 300 or 400 years. I mentioned the attitude of wanting something like a DNA test for Indian people, which is very insulting to aboriginal people across the country.

The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville stated: "We cannot continue to assemble a system that creates entitlements because of the colour of your skin. We are building a South Africa. That may sound extreme, but that is exactly what we are doing. We are going to have the same strife that South Africa is going to have".

If the hon. member were up to date on the issue he would know that South Africa is enjoying good times as a result of doing away with the apartheid policies of the previous government. Now Nelson Mandela is president and he is doing great things for the people of South Africa. That is probably the way we should go with respect to aboriginal people in Canada.

The South African people who have resided in and maintained their lands in that area are finally getting an opportunity to address their concerns, which we are also doing in the area of Nunavut. I am happy to state that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development a couple of weeks ago announced to the general public of Nunavut that it would have a role in deciding where the capital of Nunavut would be. There will be a plebiscite in the communities to determine that. Such a decision making role is precisely what the aboriginal people of British Columbia have always wanted.

British Columbia entered Confederation in 1871. At the time British Columbia entered Confederation, the aboriginal people of British Columbia were the majority. To overcome that fact, the government of the day quickly passed a law that basically stated that the aboriginal people would not have a vote.

• (1220)

In 1884 people all of a sudden found that because the aboriginal people were the majority they would be able to do a lot of commercial fishing. The government of the day passed another law, which banned the aboriginal people of British Columbia from commercial fishing. They have debated that ever since.

I do not particularly like to revisit the history. We have to improve the state the aboriginal people are in and move forward. However, a lot of Canadian people do not know the history. Sometimes it has to be revisited or the people of British Columbia will not have the opportunity to correct a lot of the wrongs that were committed against aboriginal people at that time.

I have a letter written on October 13, 1995, from someone who says: "We the people of British Columbia will not give up our property, our home and our land, to which we have registered rights". This person reiterates what Squamish Chief Joe Mathias claims, that the aboriginal people own British Columbia 100 per cent. This person says: "Members of my family are Friesians. We were in Holland well before the Dutch. Are we now going to go back and say to the Dutch government that we own Friesland 100 per cent and we want compensation?" I do not think we would give that advice to this person, to go back to Holland to claim it back from the Dutch government. However, this person should understand that when he came from Holland the aboriginal people were already in British Columbia. They are still there.

I do not think aboriginal people are suddenly going to say you cannot stay on this land because it belongs to the aboriginal people. However, I think they have a very strong case. As aboriginal people, we believe we were here long before anybody else came along. People who took our lands do have some redressing to do. We have to face the fact that a lot of aboriginal people in British Columbia will say it is our land. If people can accept the premise that they were here first, then maybe the negotiations would go a lot more smoothly and hopefully will result in making sure that justice is served to the aboriginal people of British Columbia.

I would be prepared to answer any questions that may arise.

Ms. Margaret Bridgman (Surrey North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the hon. member.

• (1225)

In his role as parliamentary secretary, is he quite satisfied with the length of time it has actually taken this government to bring this legislation to the House? As was said earlier, the legislation was already established through the agreement. It was just a matter of recopying it into a format for this House. I would like to know whether he is satisfied with a delay of two years for something as straightforward as this.