

*Supply*

Canadians—some 77 per cent—said they support the entrenchment of aboriginal self-government in the Constitution.

Having said some nice words about the useful and helpful motion, I am also pleased that my hon. friend decided to be as non-partisan as he was. He indicated that none who are outside the aboriginal community of the country can take any pleasure or delight in the past record. Even the New Democratic Party is not clean and clear in this regard. No one would want to examine all that closely the Barrett administration in British Columbia with respect to aboriginal rights and title. No one would want to look too closely at the Schreyer Government of Manitoba, especially in terms of the flooding of Indian lands. No one would want to look too closely at Mr. Blakeney's position regarding aboriginal rights in the Constitution. So we will keep it non-partisan as much as we can.

But the motion is not as clean as all that. I mean that the motion puts the Government on the spot. It says that the Government is timid and unimaginative, which is another way of saying that it is not demonstrating the type of leadership that we would expect from a government, any federal government which, in fact, knows that it has a constitutional obligation for aboriginal rights.

The National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations has said that in his view, at least to date—and I continue to believe that at the First Ministers' Conference there may be a creative relationship and significant progress made—leading up to that conference, Chief Erasmus has said that the federal Government is not playing a leadership role. Returning to the Decima Research poll, Canadians tend to feel that way as well. At least 55 per cent of Canadians think that the federal Government has done a poor job handling aboriginal efforts to gain greater control over their own lives.

It has certainly given me some pause to consider what has gone on in these many meetings leading up to the First Minister's Conference toward the end of the month. It seems to me to be unusual that the Province of Nova Scotia is at the present time desperately endeavouring to find an accommodation for the recognition of the right to aboriginal self-government.

• (1610)

I certainly welcome the efforts of Nova Scotia. The people of that province should be proud of those efforts. All of us in the House should take some pleasure in the fact that one of our provincial administrations is trying to give that kind of leadership. However, the peculiar aspect of it is that the constitutional obligation rests largely, mainly, and principally with the Government of Canada.

My hon. friend mentioned the number of treaties which have been signed in North America since the days of early settlement. He mentioned that there were in excess of 400. Those treaty obligations were accepted by the British Crown under the policy elaborated in the Royal Proclamation of

1763. Those obligations have not dissipated into air. They have not disappeared somewhere. They are still obligations but they are now transferred to the federal Government of Canada, which has accepted in our Constitution the Crown obligations stipulated in the treaties. Therefore, the federal Government cannot duck, weave, squirm, or wiggle its way out of its responsibility. All too often we have the impression that that is what motivates the Government of Canada. How can it restrict, limit, and confine its obligations under the Constitution?

Section 91(24) clearly indicates that Indians and lands reserved for Indians are our responsibility. All the best legal testimony which I have been able to read puts the broadest possible interpretation on it and indicates that Indian people include the aboriginal people of Canada. We cannot refine and restrict it. It must be interpreted in the broadest possible way.

I join with the Hon. Member for Kenora—Rainy River in urging the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) to demonstrate strong leadership at the First Ministers' Conference on March 26 and March 27. I do not believe that it is a last ditch stand or that if the conference fails all is lost. There are many other avenues and approaches which can be taken by aboriginal leaders to achieve their rights.

Let it be clearly understood that the recognition of aboriginal rights and their clear definition are inevitable. At some point in our history they will be written into our Constitution. The real question is, will the Government at this time take the leadership and work with the provinces to make that a possibility.

I ask Hon. Members what we really have to fear. What is there to fear in this process? I am reminded sometimes of Franklin Delano Roosevelt who said, when he was fighting the great economic depression, that we did not have anything to fear in trying to beat that economic beast except fear itself. Yet, I am suspicious that there is an attempt from time to time within the ranks of the Government to create a certain measure of fear.

For example, why would the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret), who is present this afternoon, say that the recognition of aboriginal self-government and the putting into effect of aboriginal self-government would cost billions upon billions of dollars? That is a fear tactic.

**Mr. de Cotret:** I never said that.

**Mr. Penner:** It is a fear tactic. It has been denied by the Assistant Deputy Minister for self-government and by aboriginal leaders.

**Mr. McKnight:** And by the President of the Treasury Board.

**Mr. Penner:** We know that billions are being spent now but that they are not being spent in a very cost-effective way. There is a sufficient number of case studies. The Hon.