

*Indian Act*

There is another very important matter which I should raise. That is the matter of determining resources which communities will need as a result of these legislative changes. No one knows how many people will apply for restoration of their rights or how many of those who do have their rights restored will decide to return to live in their communities. It is certain that the impact will be different from one Indian community to another from coast to coast to coast. The legislation does not contain a provision regarding resources simply because the entire question of resources is not addressed in the Indian Act.

● (1220)

I would like to say that currently, and speaking generally, existing levels of service and resources in Indian communities are already appallingly inferior to those received by Canadians in general. That is why I have been taking some vigorous, and I think even creative measures recently to achieve efficiencies within the spending of my own Department to try to free up funds in the next fiscal year from administration expenditures in order to move them to programs for Indian communities.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Crombie:** I have also begun, Mr. Speaker, to implement policy changes which will allow Indian communities to have a much greater control over expenditures according to their own priorities or what they themselves refer to as "block" or "global" funding. The question of resources and lands will be part of a larger review within Indian First Nations to determine actions which should be taken by the federal Government in order to ensure there is sufficient land and fiscal resources to meet federal responsibilities and obligations for all the people residing there, including those who have been restored to membership in each community by this legislation. I am sure this House would not want me to proceed on a well intentioned attempt to redress injustices of the past which would end up inflicting an even greater injustice and irreparable damage upon the resources and people of the existing Indian communities.

Following the policy of my Government to consult fully, I have received advice and guidance on this legislation from individuals, from written submissions, women's organizations, Indian groups, bands and chiefs, non-status Indian groups, national organizations, from my Department and from my colleagues in this House. Following the policy of my Government to seek consensus, I have encouraged parties to talk to each other, to attempt to reconcile their differences and to accommodate each other's concerns. I have spent many hours trying to understand and develop a course of wisdom. I invite, indeed I encourage, those who may see better approaches to present them to the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development for its consideration.

While there may be other ways to reach these objectives, I have to reassert what is unshakeable for this Government with respect to this Bill. First, it must include removal of discriminatory provisions in the Indian Act; second, it must include the restoration of status and membership to those who

lost status and membership as a result of those discriminatory provisions; and third, it must ensure that Indian First Nations who wish to do so can control their own membership. Those are the three principles which allow us to find balance and fairness and to proceed confidently in the face of any disappointment which may be expressed by persons or groups who were not able to accomplish 100 per cent of their own particular goals.

This is a difficult issue. It has been for many years. The challenge is striking. The fairest possible balance must be struck and I believe it has been struck in this Bill. I believe we have fulfilled the promise made by the Prime Minister in the Throne Speech that discrimination in the Indian Act would be ended.

In conclusion, I would like to make one or two points of a general nature and which I believe are important. Decolonizing is not a painless process. No one comes out a 100 per cent winner. We can never go back to square one and start over. We have to begin with the realities we confront today. While we can celebrate the ending of a long-standing injustice, we can grieve that the injustice ever existed at all. Some persons have expressed to me surprise that the Government's approach has not been to claim partisan credit for this Bill. I have seen cases in the past where solutions to injustice died because of an effort to exploit them for political advantage. We in this House should refrain from doing so because no one should claim pride in doing something which common decency says should have been done years ago.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Crombie:** We should refrain from doing so because the task of creating a new relationship with the aboriginal peoples of Canada is far from complete and because this legislation should be supported by all the peoples of Canada, male and female, Indian and non-Indian, and all political Parties.

I call upon all of those political Parties to support this legislation. In doing so, Canada can bring to an end sexist discrimination in the Indian Act and at the same time begin to bring to an end colonial intrusion into the affairs of the people of the First Nations.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane-Superior):** Mr. Speaker, it was Doctor Samuel Johnson, the great literary figure of the 18th century England, who once said: "Of all the ills that human hearts endure, how small the part that laws may cause or cure". It is arrogant of me, I know, and I do hesitate to disagree with such an eminent English literary figure, but when one considers the misery which has been caused in this country by the various provisions of the Indian Act, it is very difficult indeed to accept the wisdom even of such a notable man as Doctor Samuel Johnson. The effects of the Indian Act have been alarming and disturbing in the extreme.

For thousands of years before there was European immigration to this country, there existed in North America many