

arrangement and which were able, with these resources, to obtain the kind of constitutional expertise which they desired.

The latest development is the Prime Minister's most recent letter to the national native organizations in which the following message was communicated: First, patriation will not reduce the natives' rights in Canada; second, the government's commitment to work with native peoples toward constitution change remains firm; third, the list of natives' priority concerns, including aboriginal and treaty rights, internal self-government, representation in political institutions, and a guarantee of services will be addressed along with other items which would be treated as the first item on the next first ministers' meeting in the second phase after the constitution is brought home; and finally, the pursuit of the objective to entrench native rights in the constitution will likely involve a number of meetings with first ministers, and we as the government are committed to that end.

I have dealt briefly with the question of the self-reliance of Indians in the constitutional context. I should like to deal with it now in reference to the Indian Act and self-reliance in that context. It is clear to us, when we look at the Indian Act, that the relationship between Indians and government must change.

As a result of extensive consultations last summer, in which I was personally involved to a considerable degree, it became clear, first, that there is no consensus among Indian people on this subject, and I am speaking here about the Indian Act and what should be in it to foster greater self-reliance; second, that the National Indian Brotherhood does not, at this time at least, support amendments to the Indian Act. To be a little more objective, I should explain that their preoccupation at present is with the constitution; third, it became apparent to me during these consultations that there are still, however, a significant number of Indian bands who wish to assume greater control of their affairs. Therefore, we are now considering legislation to provide the option for self-government at the band level for those bands that wish it.

● (1640)

The scope of the legislation is still under review and it was subject to the type of consultation which took place during the summer. We indicated then that the legislation would establish band councils as governing bodies in their own right. It would permit them to administer their own financial affairs with accountability to their own people. Also the legislation would give them control of the administration of programs to allow them to pass and enforce bylaws within their own communities, and they would have increased responsibility for the administration of their lands and resources. These are some of the very key elements which would establish self-reliance in the context which the hon. member for Wetaskiwin talked about. They were the key elements in the proposals which I took to the Indian people this summer.

I should like to talk about self-reliance, and services to Indians. The first area with which I will deal is that of housing. I do not know if hon. members opposite are aware that last July cabinet approval was given to a submission

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which I took to my colleagues for an additional \$20 million to improve Indian housing on reserves. The amount available for housing in 1980-81 was raised to \$93 million. The long-term effect of improvements to Indian housing will be to strengthen Indian communities. They will be involved in decision-making in a much more adequate way, and now there will be much more adequate funding for them to do that.

The second area is education. It is now government policy in education to achieve two objectives: first, increased Indian control of education, and second, more adequate funding in the way they wish it. In this area the department since 1976, with the support of the National Indian Brotherhood, has pursued the goal of greater Indian control of education. Some of the more encouraging aspects on that point would be that most Indian bands have now established education committees; the department is committed to a plan to transfer up to 50 per cent of the teaching staff to Indian-controlled schools; the department, with Indians, is now reviewing current education agreements with the provinces at the request of the Indians. We are doing that with their involvement.

In terms of education achievement, Indian elementary school participation is now equal to national levels, there has been a tenfold increase in Indian participation in universities, and now Indians are virtually involved in all kinds of professional training, including nursing and legal. One only has to look at the tremendous number of Indian lawyers who, in a very articulate legal fashion, are advancing the causes of native people.

I should like to talk about economic development, which is a very worth-while preoccupation of members of the committee. A great deal of discussion with Indian people has been held over the last few months, and studies have been undertaken. Both have confirmed that for Indian economic development to be successful, it must be planned and controlled by Indian people themselves and it must go beyond the reserves as the resource base.

Our experience over the past few years has shown that economic development has been extremely successful in sectoral programs and under the auspices of such programs as the Manitoba Indians Agricultural Program, the Saskatchewan Indians Agricultural Program, and the British Columbia Indian Fishermen's Assistance Program. These initiatives have provided models for Indian control and comprehensive management by Indian people of development projects. I think the hon. member for Wetaskiwin would agree that the projects have been notably successful. Efforts have been continuing to increase Indian access to employment opportunities off the reserve. An example is the Indian Oilsands Development Corporation in Alberta which, since 1976, has participated in the Syncrude oil sands project in the province. My department is now working with Indians to ensure Indian participation in other major resource development projects such as the Alaska Highway and Polar Gas Pipeline projects.

There will have to be more exploitation of on-reserve development potential, particularly in the areas of agriculture, timber, recreation and oil-gas where the emphasis must be