

Government Orders

If we were one nation with the United States we would not even have trade laws. This is a very good example. If we were a North American community we would probably have some of these problems resolved before they ever happened. Because we are different nations we fight for each right. It is only natural.

That is why I tried to explain that when a father allows his son to go into different operations usually it brings problems with it. That is what I have been trying to point out. Division does not create unity and unity does not create division.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on this bill. Considering that we supported Bill C-33 and Bill C-34 on self-government and land claims in the Yukon, it will come as no surprise that we will also support Bill C-55.

I want to use a different approach regarding this issue. I have my own way of dealing with native issues. I do not claim to have a new approach, but I do think it is important to go and meet those who have been the victims of injustices for a long time.

Consequently, I have been to the Yukon and I would like to tell you about the attitude and the atmosphere which prevail there following, among other changes, the passing of the two aforementioned bills in the previous session, as well as the anticipated passing of Bill C-55.

It was my first visit in the Yukon, and I was accompanied by my 13-year-old daughter, who was discovering the western and north-western regions of the country. We were both amazed at the beauty of this place and astonished to see how people had settled here well before we came and shared such a lovely country. The Yukon River, for instance, is extraordinarily beautiful. When I went there, during the summer, the glaciers were melting, and this produced a kind of blue I have never seen in our rivers here in Quebec. It was fascinating to see the beauty of the countryside and also the wonderful atmosphere of the way of life in the Yukon.

● (1720)

I had read about the gold rush in the Klondike, and about what today is called Dawson City, and I had a chance to go there and see how mining operations destroyed some of this lovely countryside when they ruthlessly extracted the riches that were there, riches that did not necessarily benefit the First Nations.

I also discovered what was for instance the midnight sun, something we do not have here, but they do over there. The native people took me to the top of a mountain, The Dome, and at 11.30 p.m., I saw the sunset. I was both impressed by the sight and touched by the people's gesture.

Another surprise was the warm welcome I received. We saw this tremendous capacity of Canadian native people and aborigi-

nal people throughout the world to share what they have. These people do not feel they have been conquered. They see themselves as the first occupants and consider that the arrival of the Europeans was an opportunity for them to share their territory and their wealth.

Unfortunately, as a result of the greed of the Europeans, because that is what it was, what we did at the time was to establish a kind of social contract with these people: We will take care of you, we will take 95 per cent of your wealth and confine you to reserves and we will pay for whatever you need. This caused a lot of problems, and I will get back to this later on, but in any case, we can say that this was a case of blatant injustice which we are now trying to remedy here in the Yukon, to some small extent.

We started with the two bills I mentioned earlier, and now Bill C-55, which will make the two other bills operational, so that we are now waiting to pass Bill C-55. As I said before, C-55 makes the two other bills operational and also brings a measure of justice to these people.

In fact, people have recognized for decades, for centuries even, that there was an injustice. The native peoples realized that there was an injustice, and 21 years ago they began a process of negotiation leading to the adoption of two bills prior to this session and to the consideration of the bill before us, Bill C-55, which as I have said will make the two earlier bills operational.

I think it worth reflecting for a few moments on the first two bills. What exactly is self-government? Many are seeking a definition, but is an exact definition important, when it can mean different things to different people? I turned to the dictionary and found that self-government has to do with the importance of being politically independent to direct one's own destiny.

We have several examples, at the present time, of the non-performance of the Indian Act. Lengthy speeches are not necessary. In terms of socio-economic development, native peoples are probably the most disadvantaged group of people in Canada. And this morning I was present when the health committee noted the seriousness of the health and social problems they face.

The simple fact is that the social contract that existed at the time to take responsibility for native peoples and their wealth is no longer tenable and never was, and we are correcting the situation. Do aboriginal peoples want to take part in this process? I believe they do. If we are speaking about Yukon, there is a desire to take responsibility for their own lives, and I would say this is the case in most of Canada. Native peoples are themselves realizing that the government can no longer effectively pay for them and provide paternalistic protection, while at the same time respecting their particular conditions and values.