

This is truly a historical event when a commitment is made for the first time for the Constitutional recognition of the Indian people's right to self-government.

Quite clearly, Mr. Speaker, he was referring to the government's Constitutional proposal.

The Government had achieved this series of extraordinary successes in fewer than five months. During the Conference, even the native representatives were prepared to recognize this progress.

Those were not the only comments made at the time. A great many letters sent later on to the government and especially to the Prime Minister by several Indian chiefs provide a great testimony. These comments and the results obtained clearly demonstrate that the Prime Minister did his utmost to reach a consensus which, in our view is essential if we want to move forward and protect in the Constitution the rights of the aboriginal peoples. The Prime Minister was expressing the Government's intention to pursue that goal at the next First Ministers' Conference, and he repeated it afterwards in a broadcast statement that was made public on April 8, 1985. Far from ignoring the legitimate rights of native peoples, this Government has made giant strides in the process of recognizing those rights. And we intend to keep on doing so.

I would hate to conclude without taking this opportunity because I am well informed, seeing the everyday actions of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie) and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Crombie) . . . Under the Prime Minister's responsibility, they have held since last September quite a number of meetings and discussions both with the Provinces and the native groups. And I am absolutely sure that under their guidance, under their responsibility, and because of their determination and energy, we will manage to finalize a constitutional draft that will, first, allow native groups in this country to find within Canada the place they would like to have, and, second, reassure and assure the Provinces that they can, in the overall negotiations, and at all stages put their views forward, in order that in the future our native groups and the whole of Canada can live under a Constitution which provides that each and everyone will have the essential rights to their freedom and collective rights.

● (1550)

[English]

Mrs. Finestone: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Communications (Mr. Masse), who has just delivered a very wonderful address in the interests of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), how he would respond to the press release which I have in my hand coming from the Assembly of First Nations, which says this:

This Cabinet memorandum shockingly outlines a strategy to assimilate Indian people beginning with the 1985 Budget speech. The "Communications Strategy" outlined in the document indicates that the plan of the Government is to tell the Indian people and the Canadian public one thing; and meanwhile to begin to implement the opposite. A "buffalo jump" was a method of exterminating vast herds of buffalo to make way for colonial expansion.

Supply

The press release goes on:

Elimination of the buffalo was equivalent to elimination of the livelihood of Indian people—an act of genocide. The Prime Minister's initiative to take dollars away from Indian people is proof that the strategy outlined in the Cabinet memorandum is being implemented. The object is clearly to kill the political effectiveness of the First Nations—to exterminate the "body politic".

It concludes by saying the following:

The Prime Minister has said many wonderful things—

Just as the Minister did.

—to the public and to the Indian people in support of the unique rights of the First Nations. The initiatives of this Government, intended to stifle the political effectiveness of the First Nations makes a mockery of the Prime Minister's statements.

[Translation]

Now, could the Minister respond to that?

Mr. Masse: Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that there is a normal way to run a country, and that is to analyze and comment on official documents and not papers found in trash cans. The document in question is not an official Government document, which means that comments which may seem interesting at first glance relate to something which is not Government policy. If we and other people were to act and develop our policies according to excerpts from official documents, I am afraid we would not be in a position to run the country very well.

The concerns expressed by the Hon. Member when she quoted from the document could be valid if they were based on a document officially recognized as reflecting the position of the Government of Canada, but we all know that such is not the case, and that is indeed why the motion now under consideration is so unreal. It is because it is based on a document which does not reflect the official position of the Government of Canada. That is the position as stated by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), by the Minister concerned, namely the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Crombie), or else by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie) when constitutional problems arise. They are responsible for announcing the will and the decisions of the Government. Unfortunately, the Hon. Member's comments are not relevant to an official Government document.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): The Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) on a supplementary.

[English]

Mrs. Finestone: Mr. Speaker, I did not formulate this press conference or this press release. It was the Assembly of First Nations that did. Supportive of the Assembly of First Nations' point of view is that of the Cree regional authority.

[Translation]

—the Cree regional authority, a group you should know quite well since they are based in Quebec, and they too have filed complaints and they insist on having a meeting to obtain some clarification. And I think that as Minister of Communications,