

*Supply*

As a Member of Parliament, I sat on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development where I heard the submissions of many representatives of native communities, not only from my region, but from everywhere in Canada. These people told us about the problems they had to face in their everyday life. I also attended a few meetings between the native communities and the officials of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and more particularly a meeting at which the Minister was present. I must say, Mr. Speaker, that in his statements and all the time he was at this meeting, the Minister showed understanding and even compassion for the needs expressed by the representatives of the various communities. I have no doubt about the good intentions of the Minister and all the people who were there.

At this meeting there were representatives of all the groups from the various communities in New Brunswick, and as you are probably aware, Mr. Speaker, we have in New Brunswick two Indian nations, the Micmacs, whose territory extends beyond the boundaries of the province, and the Malecites, who live mostly along the St. John River. All these communities were represented at this meeting which had a lot of importance for them.

At this meeting, they indicated the needs of their communities in many areas, including education and especially housing. I will limit myself to these, because it might take much too much time to report everything that was said at that meeting.

In his reply, the Minister assured all the people there that he would look into these problems very carefully and make sure that his department tried to correct certain situations.

Now, when I get in touch with these communities, Mr. Speaker, I can see that the same problems still exist, that although goodwill was expressed during this meeting, the problems still remain, so that I begin to understand why these people sometimes feel so frustrated. They are simply marking time, never progressing. Here is an example. I was told that a certain community was in great need of housing. Recently, representatives of that community appeared before the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and told us they had received money for housing. Because of the need, they had started building before the winter. They had to proceed quickly to provide shelters for the people. But when the Department approved funding for this housing, it only covered building materials, not the labour. What happened is that only the basements could be built with no structure above to shelter the family. I am even afraid some of those basements may not be of any use because of ground freezing.

So when one says that these communities are frustrated, I mean when I say so, this is another example which shows why these people are experiencing such frustrations. It would seem that, well intentioned as we always are, we want to help them

but we do not carry through our good intentions to the last step, we fail to act on all our intentions and, of course, intentions are always commendable. I have in my riding four Micmac communities, the largest with 1,543 inhabitants. As a matter of fact, these people came to meet us at the standing committee to tell us about some of their problems. Mr. Speaker, I will quote from their brief:

● (1810)

[*English*]

It reads:

It is the biggest reserve in New Brunswick numbering 1,543 people which comprises 25.5 per cent of the status Indian population in the province. We live in an area that suffers one of the highest unemployment rates in the province, which is said to be around 50 per cent. The Big Cove unemployment rate is constantly at 75 per cent and sometimes goes as high as 90 per cent. There are simply no jobs available to the Indians in Kent County even though we represent a large percentage of the area's population and a large percentage of the area's economic generator. We have approximately 4,000 acres of land, but most of it does not have the type of resources that would enable us to create employment. Consequently, the lifeline of Big Cove is welfare.

[*Translation*]

So that this community is sustained by social welfare. Indeed the community had agreed to assume responsibility for administering this welfare program. They agreed although with some hesitation, because they were afraid that if they accepted this responsibility, then perhaps departmental officials would begin to reduce the funds given to the community. Well, Mr. Speaker, we read a little further and that is exactly what happened. Once they took over responsibility for administering community funds, officials began to reduce them, and the people tell us in their brief that they were not consulted at any time. So again we can understand why they should feel frustrated.

I could give you another example, this time concerning the Tobique community on St. John River, a Malecite nation, where land negotiations had begun, negotiations which had been considered for ten years and which the then Minister in 1982 had acknowledged as being over a legitimate claim, so the negotiation process was launched. Of course those people had to depend on the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to get the funds required to continue the negotiations. After a few years of negotiations—I am about to conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker—all of a sudden it was decided to suspend the negotiations and not give any more money to support the whole infrastructure which had been set up.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this is just another example of the way we Canadians and the Government, no matter how well-intentioned we may be, another example as I said which shows how we treat native people. Mr. Speaker, I hope that at the conference to be held at the end of this month there will be strong evidence of a political will to show complete understanding of and full respect for the problems and claims of these native people.