

Oral Questions

tions. I can clearly indicate our government's determination to keep and respect existing federal jurisdiction over the environment.

[English]

Mr. Jack Iyerak Anawak (Nunatsiag):

[Editor's Note: Member spoke in Inuktitut.]

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the right hon. Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs. Aboriginal people and northerners are disappointed with the government's constitutional proposal. The constitutional aspirations of northerners are put off indefinitely. In the government's proposal, aboriginal people are asked to wait 10 years while their right to self-government is defined.

Why has the government put the north and aboriginal people on the constitutional back burner?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I regret that I do not have the hon. member's skill in Inuktitut. In fact, some of the things they say about me in that language are certainly hard to translate in a favourable way.

Two serious points are raised by the hon. member. With regard to the territories and the question of evolution of government, we have made it clear that we would grandfather arrangements to allow existing territories to move to provincial status on the basis of 7/50. I know that is not what would be the first preference of people in the territories. As became clear in discussions I had with the heads of government of the two territories earlier this week, that is regarded as better than the existing situation.

With regard to native people and the historic step that we are proposing to recognize and entrench in the Constitution, their general right to self-government—

An hon. member: It already exists.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): The hon. member is incorrect. It is not something that already exists. This is a substantial change in the constitutional proposals of the country that we believe can be made acceptable across the country. We would certainly propose to begin immediately discussions on that basis, and we would certainly

propose to entrench immediately negotiations of self-government arrangements that were made.

I think the hon. member would share my view that it would be wrong for us now to try to define a particular regime of self-government, given the diversity of cultures, traditions and situations of aboriginal people across the country.

Mr. Jack Iyerak Anawak (Nunatsiag): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the same minister. I congratulate the minister on a speech he made to the Queen's University Alma Mater Society in Kingston.

Yesterday's constitutional proposal again asks aboriginal people to wait for 10 years while their right to self-government is described. In a speech on September 9, I point out, the minister responsible said that defining the exact meaning of self-government would be unwise and impractical because it would not allow for growth and recognition of differences. All we are saying is: Recognize the inherent right to self-government.

How does the minister reconcile his earlier statements with the limitations put on self-government's definition in yesterday's proposal?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the issue here is whether we are prepared to entrench a general right or a right that is called an inherent right.

The Government of Ontario, acting within its own jurisdiction, has opted for an inherent right. I said at the time that the Government of Ontario was a little ahead of the rest of us on that issue and that I expected it would probably stay there on that particular issue.

Nonetheless, what we are proposing is a very substantial change in the *status quo*, a very substantial move toward recognizing both the history of the first peoples of this country and the current reality in Canada. I think it will be regarded generally as something that is not only a major step forward as a proposal but also is a proposal that has a reasonable prospect of being accepted.

What we are trying to do in these matters is be pragmatic and find things that we can get accepted so we do not just talk about change, we achieve change. This is a change which together we can achieve.