

*Government Orders*

particularly by the Reform Party is that of equality, that these agreements, these pieces of legislation, represent an inequity as opposed to something more equal. I fundamentally and profoundly disagree with that view. These pieces of legislation and the negotiations which led to them are based on very fundamental equality, respect and dignity of all peoples for each other.

• (2000)

The agreements also recognize that all aboriginal communities are not the same. There are different cultures, different languages and different traditions even within Yukon. Therefore there must be a degree of flexibility to successfully implement and acknowledge those differences.

What is precedent setting? I have heard a great number of arguments about how dangerous these agreements are because they are precedent setting; we should all be very worried; we should be worried about apartheid; we should be worried about too many forms of government. It is quite the opposite. I think tonight is a night for rejoicing. The precedent set by these pieces of legislation is a very important one for the future of the country. The precedent is that different cultures or different linguistic groups can live together. They can do so successfully. They can negotiate to do so successfully and—this is the important precedent—they can do so within the context of Canada.

There was testimony given before the standing committee on aboriginal affairs by the governor of Yukon. It is important to note there was a strong consensus in Yukon to see the legislation go through. I have rarely in my years in the House of Commons, and indeed my years before I was in political life, seen a consensus of this nature. It was not arrived at 21 years ago. It took 21 years to arrive at this consensus, but we are at a point now in Yukon where we see the Yukon legislature passing unanimously, all parties including independent members, this companion legislation. We see as well the chamber of commerce, groups ranging from outfitters, mining associations to francoyukonnaise and other groups in Yukon unanimously supporting the passage of the legislation.

Questions have been raised about whether this was simply conducted behind closed doors. The previous government leader of Yukon in his testimony before the committee noted that during his government there were over 100 public consultations. The current government leader noted that they had many consultations with groups, with individuals and with communities and frequent discussions in every community of Yukon about the legislation as it proceeded.

The Council for Yukon Indians during this period also undertook extensive consultation. It had many general assemblies to

discuss matters and to establish its negotiating position. It has been a long and arduous process. I believe it has been a fruitful process. In a sense two decades of Yukoners have learned that it will be necessary at times to compromise. In the end we will all gain from something of benefit to all of us.

The self-government legislation is extremely important as a companion piece to the land claims. Once and for all it throws off the cloak of colonialism and acknowledges that aboriginal people are competent to run their own affairs, can run their own affairs and will run their own affairs. In the past I have heard people say they really believe in it but that maybe people are not ready. The people of Yukon, the First Nations of Yukon, have been ready for a long time and now is the time.

• (2005)

I would say as well that as we look at the implementation of these agreements, recognizing that there will be another agreement, the surface rights act, to be dealt with later in the session in the fall by this House, it will take all three pieces of legislation before a proclamation of these two pieces of legislation and that third piece of legislation.

I do want to mention in fairness that there are people in the Yukon who have some concerns about their negotiations in land claims and their future. I am pleased that the standing committee on aboriginal affairs has recognized the concerns of the Kaska Dena Council which has transboundary claims and other concerns and has agreed to monitor the negotiations with the federal government that have been agreed to and will be undertaken and that its concerns were taken seriously. For this I certainly congratulate the chair of the standing committee and members that their concerns were taken seriously and will be dealt with.

I suppose the essence of what we are doing here tonight, better than any words I would give or indeed anyone in this House might give, were given in testimony by Elder Matthew Tom to the standing committee on aboriginal affairs when he began his presentation and his prayer by saying: "We are here to hold hands not be separate". That is really what this is all about.

Sometimes I believe that people feel that we do not have to deal with history and if we just move on it will be forgotten. I believe that we all know that in life you cannot just move on, that you must deal with some of the tragedies of history in order to move forward into the present.

The words of Matthew Tom will always remain with me because it is the reason why I stand here in this House of Commons and that many Yukoners before me in politics and in First Nations have dedicated their life to this moment tonight.