

Supply

the task force report; however, I believe that the previous Government has a despicable record in this matter.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, of course when we deal with minority rights and the injustices which have lasted for a century, there is very little room for any praise to be given to anyone. I do not recall in my speech that I offered praise to anyone. The fact is that the last Government did start us down a route which we hope will be continued. Aboriginal rights were recognized in the Constitution, although they were not defined. Progressive steps were at least begun, if not completed. What we want to see in the next four years of this Parliament is the continuation of the good endeavours which were begun.

That is the impression which I received from the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development when he began his task, and in the words which he has spoken across the country. Certainly, it is the impression which I received from the Prime Minister when he spoke at the First Ministers' Conference. But it is not the impression I get when I look at the document which was leaked to the New Democratic Party, called the Nielsen report or "The Buffalo Jump of the 1980s". I get a completely different picture, which is more of a throw back. It suggests that the small, modest steps which were taken under the last administration are to be denied.

That is why we need a clarification that the foundation, even though it was not very high and about which none of us can feel very noble, will be continued. At least that foundation was a beginning. We want to build on that to have Indian self-government recognized and to have our aboriginal people become full participants in the Canadian Confederation. Surely, that is the goal of us all. I am not clear as to how partisanship enhances or furthers that to any degree.

Mr. Caccia: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior (Mr. Penner) for his fine and vibrant speech. I would like to ask him whether the propensity of the Conservative Party historically to let provincial interests override national interests bodes well for the realization of legitimate rights for aboriginal people.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, the only evidence which we have in that regard was the accord that seven Premiers agreed to at the First Ministers' Conference. I mentioned that in my speech. It was not an accord which the Indian people could accept, because it did bring into the process, to an unacceptable degree, the participation and involvement of the provinces. We already know from the First Ministers' Conference how frustrating that can be. I think at some point in time, if we want to make progress, we are going to have to move forward as much as we can based on a bilateral relationship. Some day we may have to have a resolution, supported by all Parties in this House, affirming that one of the aboriginal rights in our Constitution is the right to Indian self-government. But that, of course, leads to a very serious omission, that is, how will we do that and accommodate the aspirations of the Métis people of Canada? That is one problem which would be outstanding if we went the bilateral route.

● (1240)

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, in listening to the comments of the Hon. Member for Comox-Powell River (Mr. Skelly), it occurred to me that none of us in this country, no political Party, has anything to be proud about with respect to our record on Indian affairs. I can recall when I was Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, there were New Democratic Governments in British Columbia and in Manitoba. In Manitoba, that Government flooded eight or ten of the northern reserves, disregarding the aboriginal rights of the people there. In British Columbia the New Democratic Government which was in power, after making a commitment to the Nishga that their claim would be settled, did not do so, and the member of the New Democratic Party from the area, I believe, resigned.

There is no doubt that we have blots on our copy as Liberals. So have all Parties. I think what we have to do today is to learn a lesson. I want to ask the Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior (Mr. Penner) about the lessons which many of us learned during the process of the Special Committee on Indian Self-Government, of which he was the chairman, when we all travelled about the country for months. I think what we have to do is adopt a completely new attitude, admit that our Parties were wrong in the past and look to the future with a different attitude. I think the Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior will confirm that in the process we undertook through the committee, that did happen. We saw many people in this House who first doubted the right of the aboriginal people to have self-government come around to a new way of thinking, and that is the way we have to move. I would like the Hon. Member to comment on the process of the committee.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, when we think of the work of the Special Committee on Indian Self-Government, we not only have to think of the recommendations but of the process itself. The process very simply was non-partisan. During that whole year in which we lived, worked and travelled together, partisanship never entered in any significant way into the work we were doing. In addition to that, we involved the recognized aboriginal organizations of this country who were concerned with this particular issue and they worked along with us.

I believe when people look at the report they will see not only the recommendations, the words on the page, but the process. There is a lesson to be learned there by Parliamentarians and by the Canadian people in general.

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I am both troubled and enraged to have to participate in this debate today. What I intend to do is to lay out the chronology of what has brought us to today, because I think it is important that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Crombie), who is going to speak following my remarks and the remarks of the Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior (Mr. Penner), listen to the three very important parts of the motion before us today.

First, regarding the staging of the April 1 First Ministers' Conference, I don't think you could find an Indian or Inuit