

• (1600)

I have to refute the "one Canada" view that I have heard expressed, the idea that in a democratic society we are all absolutely the same and equal. All of us have special rights or status of sorts as men, as women, as heirs. Obviously, one who does not inherit wealth is at a disadvantage compared to someone who does. Democracy does not suppress dissent. It does not suppress dissent at the level of opinion, and it should not suppress dissent at the level of tradition.

In the context of asserting their identity, the aboriginal people of Canada through the Assembly of First Nations have passed several resolutions this week. They are the following. They will not accept any amendment that would prejudice existing treaty rights. They will maintain their legitimate demand for inherent rights. They will pursue an amendment calling for adequate financing. The candles be lit in every aboriginal household across Canada on the eve of the First Ministers' Conference. They endorse the fundamental principles on treaties as an integral part of their constitutional amendment proposal. When none of the 484 treaties ever renounced the right of aboriginal societies to structure and govern themselves, why should the aboriginal people ever consider giving up their effort to reclaim that fundamental right?

There are several principles that are worth putting on the record in the House that have been enunciated by the AFN. They are that the First Nations made treaties with the Crown as sovereign nations; that the treaties provide acknowledgement by the Crown of the sovereignty of the First Nations; that they were made on a nation-to-nation basis and thus have the status of international treaties; and that the rights contained in those treaties are not subject to federal or provincial legislative override, or any other form of unilateral change. In order to fulfil the spirit and intent of those treaties a constitutionally entrenched process for the re-examination of them has to be established.

What support do the aboriginal people have? The evidence is that, contrary perhaps to public and government belief, there is overwhelming support for the rights of the aboriginal people of Canada. According to the results of a recent poll some 84 per cent of Canadians believe it is important for Canada's political leaders to come to an agreement on aboriginal self-government. Some 77 per cent support entrenchment of aboriginal self-government in the Constitution; and 61 per cent believe that both federal and provincial governments are equally responsible for negotiating and implementing self-government agreements over the next 10 to 20 years.

The Government's actions to date do not augur well. There has been minimal attempt to enlighten Canadians as to the significance of these discussions. There has been little public knowledge of any attempt to exercise the Government's leadership and influence, that should be there, on the western provinces of B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan which have apparently stood against the entrenchment of the rights, and also on the Province of Ontario which appears to be back-

Supply

pedalling. Instead, we have had—and I agree with them as mere statements—pious platitudes from the Government in the House. Justice demands that these rights be in the Constitution. Paternalism has failed. The aboriginal people are willing and able to accept the responsibility.

[*Translation*]

I wish to translate the aspirations of our native people in terms that Quebecers can understand and associate with the fact that our native people want a government in their own image.

[*English*]

So much flows from this because those who cannot learn from the errors of the past are forever condemned to repeat them. I must warn the Government, and all Canadians, that the repetition of these errors would be many times more numerous, many times more expensive in every term, and many times more shameful to Canada than they have been in the past.

The aboriginal renaissance awaits us. Where there is no vision the people perish. The aboriginal people of Canada seek not to be wards but partners in the future of this confederation which has, if we take the right steps, the potential to confer on Canada glories that can far outshine both the achievements and the failures of the past.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If there are no questions or comments, the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior (Mr. Penner) on debate.

Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, in speaking to this debate I want to begin by commending the Hon. Member for Kenora—Rainy River (Mr. Parry) for proposing a motion which all Hon. Members can readily support. I certainly find its wording and its concepts to be very helpful coming as it does in this month leading up to the First Ministers' Conference on Aboriginal Rights. So it is a motion that I can happily support, and one which my Leader can certainly support. The aboriginal people who heard my Leader speak at noon today to their rally on Parliament Hill will be able to confirm that. It is certainly a position which my Party can support. That is well demonstrated by the important resolutions on aboriginal rights that were approved at the recent policy conference held by the Party of which I am a member.

Most important, this is a motion that would find support with the Canadian people. My hon. friend has already referred to the important Canadian attitude study which was commissioned by the Inuit Committee on National Issues and carried out by Decima Research which indicates that an overwhelming 84 per cent of Canadian people believe that it is very important, or important, for Canada's political leaders to come to an agreement on the issue of aboriginal self-government. The results of the study show that an equally large majority of