

Routine Proceedings

I call on the House to take a very careful look at the documents that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development submitted to us yesterday. I also call on the House to look at the record of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in these kinds of issues. This is the same department that has forcibly moved native people off the land. In Nova Scotia, for example, it has forcibly combined and concentrated the Micmac Indians into two communities as another experiment. This country and this Department of Indian Affairs has done experiments on native people that would be the envy of Joseph Stalin's collectivization program or the envy of Josef Mengele.

• (1140)

It is time that the House recognizes the wrong-doings it has done to native people in the country, systematic wrong-doings it continues to do and will continue to do if it accepts the report issued by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development on behalf of his bureaucrats in the House.

The one thing we have to do, and the one choice we have to make here today, is to accept either the minister's report, which is a complete and utter fabrication, a collection of lies of the worst order, or we can accept the report of the select standing committee of the House which was based on direct evidence of the people affected. It is a question of confidence, Mr. Speaker. I hope this issue comes to a vote and I hope that all members on all sides of the House support this motion.

Hon. Shirley Martin (Minister of State (Indian Affairs and Northern Development)): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to report to the House on a matter of great importance to Canada's future.

The relationship between Canada and the aboriginal people has certainly had a difficult history. So difficult, in fact, that some are prepared to believe the worst of any situation concerning how we dealt with each other in years gone by. That, I think, is the attitude which has led many to accept the charges that in the early 1950s, the government of the day callously and cruelly uprooted a number of Inuit families from their communities and deposited them without food or resources in a hostile environment, all in the name of sinister and incomprehensible political interests.

We have heard a very passionate presentation by the member opposite telling us that the reports that have been made to the House are fabrications of lies of the worst order. I would like to take an opportunity now in the House to present another view of the issue and to tell the members of the House the government's position on the relocation of the Inuit residents to Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay in the 1950s. Much of this was based on an independent report, not an in-house report, but one of an independent nature.

First, I would like to remind the House that nearly four decades ago the far north was still pristine with plentiful wildlife and the high Arctic held hope and promise for the Inuit, who at the time were facing great hardships further south, and the plan was to improve their social and economic prospects.

In the period 1953 to 1957, the federal government relocated a number of Inuit families from Inukjuak in the northern Arctic of the Northwest Territories. It was only years later that some of the Inuit wished to return to Inukjuak at government expense.

In June of this year, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs made five recommendations about that relocation. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development responded to those recommendations yesterday.

To understand the relocation, one must put the events which occurred in 1953 into historical perspective. In the 1950s the Government of Canada tried to assist northern native people in their pursuit of traditional livelihood. For those Inuit who wished it, the government was also willing to help them integrate at their own pace into the economic development that was occurring in the north.

Occasionally, hunting was poor in particular areas of the north and many people experienced hardship. At the time of the move the Inukjuak game had been depleted. The Inuit population was growing. The Inuit living there were facing difficult times.

The government's aim was to relocate the people to areas in which wildlife was more plentiful. The move to the Northwest Territories was based upon the abundance of game in the hopes of providing the Inuit with a better life. There was no hidden agenda in this project. It was undertaken with the best intentions and evidence clearly