

Witnesses unanimously rejected any band government bill. Their principal criticism was that the proposal involves a delegation of power rather than a recognition of the sovereignty of Indian First Nation governments. Indian governments are not to be regarded as junior governments, they said, and any changes should involve more than a transfer of administrative responsibility. To do otherwise would be to continue the old policies.

We are disappointed in the extreme by the narrow and limited version of self-government which the Minister has put forward. It seems deliberately to be slanted to focus discussion on the minor and administrative aspects of self-government, when it could range to far more broad and mature concepts. (Blood Band, Sub 8:134)

Witnesses were also concerned that the proposed legislation would alter the trust relationship between the federal government and Indian people. Witnesses insisted that the special relationship not be changed.

We oppose the suggestion that new legislation would alter in any significant way the special trust relationship that exists between the Crown and the Indian people of Canada. Any legislation of Indian self-government should not be employed by Parliament as an indirect measure of diminishing trust responsibilities of the federal government. (Swampy Cree Tribal Council, Special 35:13)

A fear that legislation would convert Indian governments into municipal governments was also raised:

Implicit in the concept is a transition from an Indian reserve with communal land holdings to a provincial municipality in which land titles, property taxation and provincial legislative control are paramount. In such a context the status and function of an Indian chief and council could be relegated to a virtual non-entity. There would be an inevitable loss of Indian jurisdiction. (Indian Association of Alberta, Letter to the Minister, February 1, 1983)

Witnesses also criticized the reference to whether bands were "ready" to govern, a suggestion that reinforces the colonial attitude that Indians must be taught to manage their own affairs.

In the Minister's paper to the committee, entitled *The Alternative of Optional Indian Band Government Legislation*, he makes a number of references to bands being able to demonstrate a level of ability, or the ability of developing that service delivery capability themselves. These are not the standards set by the Indian people for their councils, but the Department's criteria. This approach clearly reveals a deep-seated colonial mentality based on the notion that the uncivilized have to be raised by the administrative measures and taught to manage their own affairs. (Indian Association of Alberta, Sub 8:13)

Some bands even suggested that current difficulties in obtaining funds are a tactic to make the new proposals seem attractive.

We realize that the Minister has repeatedly stated that this legislation is optional. It is only optional for the bands who are not getting any funds from the Department of Indian Affairs. In reviewing the proposed legislative framework, only bands who have opted into the legislation will be available for increased funds for their administration. Divide and conquer again. It seems clear to us that the legislation is a form of blackmail to the bands dependent on the Department for their transfer grants. (Indian Association of Alberta, Sub 8:14)