

Indian Affairs

promote a widespread recognition of the real and urgent need for true Indian self-reliance to be realized. Judging from the hon. member's comments, the opposition has obviously read and concurs in that report since it endorsed its logical conclusion that greater self-reliance is not only desirable but also essential.

However, some other aspects of the situation have apparently gone undetected by the drafters of this non-confidence motion today. The government is committed not only to promoting Indian self-reliance in all possible ways but also to ensuring that all Canadians and their representatives are mindful that this is a fundamental objective of government policy and of government actions.

The principle of self-reliance is basic to the government's approach to the constitution. In the Indian Act we emphasize self-government and the provision of services. As an example I can cite housing, education, economic development and the preservation and enhancement of Indian language and culture.

● (1630)

First, I should like to talk about self-reliance in the constitutional context, in the context of constitutional development. Contrary to the position taken in today's motion, what is happening on the constitutional front is not a failure but a testament to the government's commitment to promote Indian self-reliance. Here are some examples. A decade ago, the government began to address seriously the issues of native rights by encouraging Indian participation in the development of a mutual understanding of their nature and extent. Issues underlying concepts of aboriginal and treaty rights are complex. They require extensive consultations, both with Indians and with provinces. These issues include, from the native perspective, the right to self-government, hunting, fishing and trapping rights, education and language rights, a special share in resource revenues, special provisions pertaining to family law, the administration of justice, and so on.

For the record, I want to review some highlights of the government's efforts to encourage native participation in constitutional renewal.

In June of 1978 "A Time for Action"—a basic document of the government of the day—gave priority to the place of native peoples in constitutional renewal. The constitutional amendment in Bill C-60 provided an opportunity for native-government dialogue on the proposed charter of rights. In October and November of 1978, native observers were invited and welcomed by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) to the first ministers' conference.

On January 30, 1979, the Prime Minister invited national native federations to send observers to the second first ministers' conference. On February 5 and 6 of 1979, at the conference, the Prime Minister proposed that the ministers meet with native leaders to explore their constitutional concerns. On February 12 of 1979 the Prime Minister released a list of new constitutional items, including "Canada's Native Peoples and the Constitution."

On April 29, 1980, the Prime Minister gave a speech on the constitution at the National Indian Brotherhood's all chiefs conference, and focused on the need to define aboriginal and treaty rights, native self-government, native representation in political institutions, and federal-provincial responsibilities for the provision of services to native people.

On August 11, 1980, the Prime Minister sent a letter to the national native organizations affirming observer status at the upcoming first ministers' conference on the constitution. On August 26, 1980, the continuing committee of ministers on the constitution met in subcommittee with native leadership, received briefs and discussed their concerns.

From September 8 to 12 of 1980 the first ministers' conference was held at which attention was drawn by a number of premiers and the Prime Minister to native rights issues.

On October 2, 1980, a resolution was proposed for a joint address to Her Majesty that the constitution be returned to Parliament. Section 24 of the charter of rights in that document was to ensure that the proposed resolution in no way detracted from any rights of the Indian people, whether it be statute law or treaty proclamations in the jurisprudence that has developed over the years.

On October 10 and 17 of 1980, the Prime Minister assured the House that constitutional negotiations with native leaders would continue and that any changes directly affecting native peoples would only be made after discussion with them. The Prime Minister stated that meetings with native leaders would continue to take place to consider how best to protect native rights.

One aspect of this chronology has been left to the last because it is so central to the issue of Indian self-reliance raised in motion. Last April, the Prime Minister announced to the National Indian Brotherhood conference that \$1.2 million had been approved, \$400,000 for each of the three national native organizations, to help them prepare for discussions on the constitution. On November 7, 1980, the Prime Minister, in response to questions from members, made note of this contribution and of subsequent meetings and correspondence. Also on November 7 the Prime Minister said:

The precise definition of those rights in a written constitutional document is something, I repeat, that we have assisted the Indians, native people, Metis and the Inuit to research for themselves. If they come up with some form of amendment which is acceptable to all parties in this House—and, I should say hopefully, to several of the provincial governments—we are prepared to accept amendments on this as on other things. I would merely want to point out to the hon. member that I think the simple claim of aboriginal rights, without anyone knowing exactly what it means, is not a matter which one can convincingly argue should be put in the constitution at this time. First of all, the courts would be called upon to interpret such a constitutional amendment, and I think everyone would want to know what aboriginal rights are, what is their extent, to whom they apply, and so on.

Hence the justification for the research money which was made available to enable the Indian and native associations to deal with their constitutional position. That money has been utilized, I think. As we noted, the committee on the constitution which is sitting right now will be hearing native organizations throughout this week. It has already heard from the Inuit organizations which made ample use of this type of funding