

Government Orders

It is time we settled these land claims so that all British Columbians, aboriginals and non-aboriginals, can get on with the job of building a prosperous society in our province, a society where all groups can enjoy the wealth, the resources that the province has to offer. This will benefit all British Columbians and all Canadians.

I hope I have said it slowly enough so that the third party across the House can understand. It is time.

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the government talking about dealing with the issue of land claims negotiations quickly and resolving the problems.

We heard of an Indian settlement area on the west coast that has been working for 23 years to resolve these issues. A whole generation has spent time negotiating with governments that obviously have not come to any sort of agreement. The negotiation is still not finished after 23 years.

My colleagues and I agree that it is very important to get on with the job to settle the land claim issue and to negotiate with the aboriginal people. However it is not right for the government to hold out unrealistic goals for aboriginal people. It is not fair to the aboriginal people to lead them to expect more than what they are likely to achieve through the process.

I spent 15 years living in an aboriginal community in northern Alberta. I spent three years working to prepare non-treaty settlement areas for self-government. I know the process. I have been through the process and it can be done successfully. However they have to be very realistic in their expectations of what government and the people will help them to achieve.

I do not think this government is any more able than the previous government unless it comes into these negotiations with a very realistic perspective.

I am concerned. I would like to ask a question of the hon. member for Vancouver Centre. Why has it taken the government over two years to come up with legislation to support the process which I feel may work in British Columbia? Why has it taken the government two years to address that issue?

• (1040)

Ms. Fry: Mr. Speaker, obviously three parties participate in the process: the Government of British Columbia, the Government of Canada and the summit. These three parties have to agree on what the framework will be to set up the whole treaty organization process. That takes a long time.

If the hon. member knows anything about negotiations, and she just said she did, you would understand also because you talked about—

The Deputy Speaker: I ask the hon. member to direct her remarks to the Chair.

Ms. Fry: The hon. member claimed that she understands negotiations. I would think the member would know that setting up the intent in an opening position is not what one ends up deciding on. Realistic agreements do not come until the process has taken place, until people have come to the table and have talked. Then they come with a settlement.

I do not think the hon. member understands negotiations at all.

Margaret Bridgman (Surrey North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I repeat my colleague's question to the member for Vancouver Centre. Why did Bill C-107, which recognizes the fact that we have B.C. Treaty Commission, take the government two years?

I do not want to get into a debate on levels of understanding of the process. It did not take the past two years to come to an agreement. The agreement was reached on September 21, 1992. In May 1993 the summit brought in its resolution. In May 1993 the B.C. government passed its resolution. In October 1995 we are debating it. Why so long? This is a typical example of the 23 years or however long it has taken on these issues. Why did it take two years for the government to bring it to the table now?

Ms. Fry: Mr. Speaker, I really thought I had answered that question. However it is obvious I have to repeat it so it is understood.

Getting three groups together to come to an agreement to write a piece of legislation takes time and agreement on every single part of the legislation before it can be brought to the table. This is a very technical and difficult process. We need to ensure when the legislation is done and on the table that everyone can agree to sign and can believe and trust it. It takes time to work that ground to ensure there is trust and there is agreement on the process.

Mr. Jack Iyerak Anawak (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.):

[*Editor's Note: Member spoke in Inuktitut.*]

[*English*]

It is both a pleasure and an honour to speak to Bill C-107 today. The time has come to move forward on the issue. I am reminded of a comment made by the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville who, unlike his fellow members in the third party, does not realize this issue of land claims is what we have been talking about for many years. I refer to a quote of the hon. member for