

*Indian Act*

women, have worked very hard for this day to come. It is regrettable that Parliament did not have adequate time to make a proper study. The committee was pushed. It is not precisely the Bill that we would have liked. Native women are not happy with it. The Assembly of First Nations is not happy with it. The National Action Committee is not happy with it. We would all have liked something a little different from what we have before us. Nonetheless, this is a historic day. A historic injustice to native Canadian women is going to be corrected. That is something to celebrate.

● (1420)

I want to pay tribute to the many native women who have struggled to achieve equality for themselves and their sisters. I think of women like Lavell and Bedard who took cases to the Supreme Court of Canada and were denied justice and equality by the Supreme Court of Canada under the old Bill of Rights. I think of women like Sandra Lovelace who took her case to the United Nations and brought international attention to the disgraceful discrimination which is currently in Section 12(1)(b) of the current Indian Act. I think of the women who have worked for rights for Indian women and for the Native Women's Association of Canada and the various other Canadian women's groups which have supported them. I think very especially of Mary Two-Axe Early who struggled a long time ago. She went before the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. Year after year she has lobbied the Government. She is here in the galleries today. We really must pay tribute to her for the patience, courage and nobility of her struggle. She is a splendid person. She exemplifies what is so important in native Canadian women.

It is due to the quality of people like this that we can rejoice at having this Bill passed today. It means that with their courage, determination, intelligence and commitment to their bands and to their people, native women will be part of the struggle of native people for justice and for a fair part in Canadian society. Women who until now have had to struggle for their rights within their communities can now unite with their communities to work for a better place in Canadian society.

We have the pleasure of being part of a Parliament that is correcting a historic injustice. This is not perfect legislation, but a terrible problem is going to be solved. We can all be very proud that on this last day of Parliament we will leave knowing that we have done good work in changing this historic wrong in Canadian society.

**Mr. John McDermid (Brampton-Georgetown):** Mr. Speaker, I spoke briefly last night at the end of the committee meeting. At that time I had the feeling inside that I had betrayed my best friend. If this Act had not passed, I guess I would have had the same feeling. As my friend from St. John's West would say, we were caught between a rock and a hard place, all because of an Act that is known as an Act respecting Indians, the Indian Act, which is probably the worst piece of legislation on the books in the House of Commons.

I am not going to belabour the point, but I want to express my extreme displeasure at this Bill coming in so late. We on the committee felt like hostages. I think that I can speak for all those who were on the committee. We worked extremely hard in a non partisan way to try to come to a suitable conclusion with Bill C-47. Every single witness who appeared before that committee, including our friend Dr. Mary Two-Axe Early, was not happy with this Bill. The Native Women's Association, the Assembly, the Alberta Association of Indians, and the Coalition of Indians were all there. None of them liked it. Indian Rights for Indian Women were representing the feelings of the National Action Committee and they were not happy with it. Even the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, who appeared before the committee, was not entirely happy with the Bill. The amendments which she would have liked to have added to the Bill could not get through Cabinet.

We had to try to amend this Bill to make it as workable as possible. I am not happy with it. I do not like it. However, as a kid, you have to hold your nose, close your eyes, and take that damn medicine your mother rams down your throat. There are very legitimate concerns being expressed. That is why I insisted that an amendment be introduced last night, that is the new Clause 13 of the Bill. It says that this Parliament will investigate through a committee the very serious ramifications of what we are doing with the bands.

I asked the Minister responsible for the Status of Women whether she considered this to be an Indian issue under the whole scope of Indian issues, or whether it was entirely a women's issue. She said it was a women's issue. Indian Rights for Indian Women said it was an Indian issue. The Native Women's Association said it was an Indian issue. Yet they most genuinely want their status returned. I understand that. I also understand the self-determination that the Indian people want. They were once a proud people and they want that pride restored. I understand that. I am hopeful that in the next Parliament we will be able, in a very reasonable length of time, to come up with workable solutions which will respect that request.

We are supporting the Bill, but we are not happy with it. I want to assure the Indian people that when this Parliament comes back that clause which we put in will be activated and we will have a proper study. We have not had a proper study. We will have a proper study of the ramifications. We will get the facts, figures, and information which is necessary to make a reasoned decision on how this Act can best be implemented.

I would like to thank everyone who has worked with me on this Bill in the committee. I have met many new people. I have enjoyed their advice, their constructive criticism and their support. I can assure them once again that this Bill will not destroy their way of life. We will work to make sure that it preserves the Indian culture and the right of Indians to self-determination. We are exercising paternalism of the worst kind. The Indian people agree that this offensive clause in the Indian Act must be done away with.

For some reason I am not happy today. My hon. colleague from Broadview-Greenwood tells me that this is a historic and