

*The Constitution*

the Hon. Member for Manicouagan will be very interested in the report of the special committee on Indian self-government because that report will address many of the issues that he brought forward in the debate regarding the aboriginal people, the way that they relate to the people of Canada and to the Government of Canada. The protection of their lifestyle and culture is tied to a land base and that land base is very important to them. We will address that in our report.

I must say again that this Party and I approve of this resolution, the amendment to the Constitution. We want it passed with all haste. There are, however, some legitimate concerns that have been brought forward by Members of all Parties in this House and as well by various groups which appeared before the committee.

Let me quote the words of national chief Ahenikew who appeared before the standing committee on Monday night. I think his remarks really reflect some of the concerns that Members have regarding the process by which this amendment has been brought to the House. He said:

If you stop to think of what is really happening here, Parliament has been put in a similar position to the Indians. You—

**Meaning Parliament.**

—have a choice of rubber stamping an accord in which you have had minimum, if any, participation.

That is true. Members of Parliament have had very little participation in this whole process. In fact, we were not able to get any of the Government papers before the actual constitutional discussions were going on at the Conference Centre across the street. We had no idea what positions the national Government was taking to that conference. I hope in the future that can be amended. I know the various aboriginal groups were very forthcoming with their positions. They were putting them before Members of Parliament and before the country constantly. We really had no idea of the positions of a number of the Provinces and of the federal Government. What we, as Members of Parliament, are being asked to do today is, in fact, either to approve or to reject this process. If we amend it, we will have to go through the whole process again because the Provinces are involved in the amending process.

I agree completely with the statement which the National Chief put before the committee on Monday night. He went on to say:

● (1750)

Or, you can refuse to do so and see the constitutional process fade out of existence. Parliament should have been involved in an overseer role, from the beginning, to see that the process which produced the Accord was just and equitable, and in which the first nations had a determining voice. The entire process to which we were subjected caused divisions among the first nations. We cannot afford to be divided. Those who decided not to participate in the constitutional talks were as concerned as those who did. We did not divide ourselves. It was the process that divided us. What happens this year cannot allow that division to continue. In that respect, I must emphasize to you that my wish that the resolution be approved should not be interpreted to mean that I approve the participation of the Provinces. Nor do I approve the process. Nor do I mean that the rights of those first nations that did not participate should be disregarded.

Basically the National Chief was saying that Indian, Inuit and Métis people are very concerned about the participation of the Provinces. They recognize that their rights flow through the Indian Act to the federal Government and, as a result, are very concerned that some of the rights they have attained could be passed off to the Provinces and their way of life could be lost. There is great concern regarding the process. They would far rather there be discussions between the aboriginal people and the federal Government and then the results of that discussion taken to the Provinces so that each and every party knows exactly the stands being taken before they go into a public forum with television cameras, the Premiers, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and a number of officials.

It is very difficult when negotiations take place before the entire country and television cameras for people not to play to the country. Therefore, there is often a question as to whether true negotiation can take place in such a forum. Aboriginal groups brought this concern before the committee, as they were asked for their ideas.

Also there seemed to be lack of direction. The agenda was set and a great number of items were placed on it. The groups were not sure which item would be chosen for debate. This caused some difficulties. The term "aboriginal people" in a Canadian sense as well as in the world sense is one about which we have to be concerned because it does not distinguish one group from another. The Constitution indicates that aboriginal people are Indian, Inuit and Métis. They are concerned that there may be an over-emphasis on one group as opposed to another and suggest that we ought to start identifying them individually rather than as a group, which makes sense.

The process in the past has been that various aboriginal groups deal with bureaucrats in ongoing discussions before they actually get into the forum of discussion with the Provinces and the Prime Minister. The various groups that appeared before us were very concerned about this process and hoped that they could have discussions directly with Ministers as well as with the various officials, although the officials on all sides play an important part in the process.

The Inuit who appeared before us felt that politicians should be more involved in the process than they were in the past. They made a very firm recommendation that there be more information and more involvement by various political Parties in and before the next constitutional conference. Again and again each group appeared before the committee and indicated their concern that they did not know what was the position of the federal Government; they did not know on which of the agenda items there would be concentration in the next constitutional conference. It is very easy for the federal and provincial Governments, with their officials, to prepare themselves for all agenda items and then, with the give and take of the conference to concentrate on the one which seems to be in order, the one the provincial Premiers and the Prime Minister wish to discuss.

Aboriginal groups are given specific funding by the Secretary of State (Mr. Joyal) to prepare themselves for all the