

*Indian Act*

correctly, I believe the timing was something like six days or so.

The argument was that this discrimination had been around a long time and that it was time to get rid of it. I do not think there was a soul in the community that could disagree with that. However, there was still some conflict and some concerns were expressed by various groups, including the Native Women's Council of Canada, the AFN and other very interested groups.

There was at that time a compromise arranged through the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations which I think was very significant. It was very important for us as parliamentarians to see that type of agreement reached between two groups which in some instances had been at odds.

Needless to say, the Bill went through. The Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior quoted me accurately today when he said that I stated in the debate that we must hold our nose and pass this Bill. None of us were happy. We all felt very uncomfortable about it. We felt that this might be the last opportunity to have this Bill passed, so it was passed. History will show that the Senate did not pass it and that it died on the Order Paper.

I want to say a couple of things about the present Minister. He assumed his new responsibilities shortly after the election of September 4. I do not think there is another Minister who is working harder—I know there are some working as hard—on their portfolio than the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Crombie). He has devoted a tremendous amount of time in trying to meet the various groups, organizations, associations and individuals who play a very important part within that Ministry and who, in the jargon of this place, are client groups. I do not like that terminology, but that is the way they are referred to, no matter what the Ministry is.

He has been doing an excellent job. Bringing in this Bill—although not perfect and there will be debate and representations in committee—he has gone a tremendous way to meet many of the objections that we heard last June on Bill C-47. That has been acknowledged today and that is fair enough. I congratulate the Minister for that work.

I want to encourage the members of the standing committee to study this Bill and to give fair hearing to those who want to make representation, but not to hold this Bill up for political purposes. This is such an important Bill that we cannot get into playing politics with it. That is very important. I know my hon. friend in the New Democratic Party, whom I enjoyed working with last year, my colleague from Cochrane-Superior and others who served very well on that committee feel the same way. If they do not, I guess I am not as great a judge of character as I thought I was.

I encourage all those who are associated with the Bill, including those who will be making representations, to treat this Bill in a very fair and open-minded way. It may not satisfy every individual's desire. Very few pieces of legislation that

pass through this place do satisfy every special interest group connected with it. Neither does it probably satisfy at all times Members of Parliament who are on the government side. Politics is the art of compromise, and I am sure that when this Bill is brought back to the House for third reading, if there are amendments to it, it will be absolutely the best Bill that we can bring in to do with the removal of discrimination in the Indian Act.

The year leading up to the election was a rewarding one. I listened today to the Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) with great interest when she suggested that our good friend Mary Two-Axe Early be appointed to the Senate. I would like to say to my hon. friend from Mount-Royal that I would not want to inflict that on such a wonderful, warm, genuine person as Mary Two-Axe Early. There are far better fates for Mary Two-Axe Early. We can reward her much more significantly than by putting her in the Senate. She has been a wonderful friend to all parliamentarians. I know she was a great help to me when I was spokesman for the Party. She is the kind of person you cannot help but feel very comfortable and warm with. I too want to pay tribute to her, but I do not suggest that she be appointed to the Senate.

I wish to talk for a moment about some of the concerns that have been expressed in previous Bills and what is happening in this Bill. Some areas have been covered very effectively by Hon. Members today. Some bands, however, were very concerned about enfranchisements where individuals who were enfranchised received a fair-sized pay-out from an Indian band once they left the band. Some bands, although very few, have done extremely well with exploiting the resources found on their band properties. When individuals were enfranchised, they were very well taken care of. Some bands in Alberta, for example, were very concerned about this. They were greatly concerned about someone who had received a pay-out and was automatically brought back into the band without having paid back his or her share or given any accounting for the share he or she had taken out already when they were enfranchised.

• (1540)

The Minister has obviously taken that into consideration in these amendments and I congratulate him for that because now, according to this Bill, persons regaining band membership who previously had received the per capita pay-outs from the band capital and revenue accounts will not be able to benefit from current distributions of band funds until the amount forgone equals the amount they received earlier plus interest. As Hon. Members may know, in some instances that amounts to many thousands of dollars. The Minister has included that concern in the legislation. I think that is a very, very important part of this Bill.

There are other important parts of this Bill. A woman who marries a member of another band no longer automatically becomes a member of her husband's band. Transfers between bands will still be possible if the receiving band agrees. The band has control over its membership, and I think that is very important.