

The Address—Mr. Penner

I want to be fair. It is true that the Government of Canada has endeavoured to carry out consultations with Indian people regarding policies and programs, but the process has not worked. It has been totally unsatisfactory, so much so that in the Indian community today the word "consultation" has been discredited. It is a tainted and unacceptable word.

● (1150)

To be perfectly fair, and I want to be fair, the Government has made efforts to transfer administrative responsibility to the Indians, but it has never transferred any real control. In transferring administrative responsibilities, it has created more officials to monitor, examine, check and cross-check, to look over the shoulder and breathe down the neck with a never-ending series of memorandums and directives. The special committee that I chaired learned, for example, that there are Indian chiefs and councils across this country that are spending up to 75 per cent of their time as elected people, looking after the administrative over-burden imposed upon them by the federal bureaucracy, the Department of Indian Affairs.

This House is generous, or so it would seem, in appropriating \$2 billion annually for all of these programs for Indians. Surely to goodness there is something to show for that amount of money. There must be something good out there to which we can point with pride, because \$2 billion is a lot of money.

Let me refer to some statistics, Mr. Speaker. Among Indians there are five times the national average of children who are taken into care. Among Indian young people, only 20 per cent complete high school compared to the national average of 75 per cent. Housing? Well, I do not even want to get started describing housing in Indian communities. It is just deplorable. No other Canadian would live in such conditions.

Income? Indian people have one-half to one-third the national average income. My hon. friend across the way spoke with great passion about the serious problem of unemployment. I share his concern. We have a national rate of unemployment of 11.2 per cent, which is shocking, but among Indian people it is 35 per cent on average. There are Indian communities where unemployment is as high as 80 per cent or 90 per cent.

Infant mortality is 60 per cent higher among Indians than the national rate. As for life expectancy, an Indian woman can expect to live for 66 years; a non-Indian woman in Canada can expect to live 79 years on average. There are too many Indians in prison. There is far too much alcoholism among Indian people, too many violent deaths and too many suicides. All of this is well documented in the Government's own report published in 1980 entitled "Indian conditions—A survey". It is all there, and much more.

It is a shocking, dreadful story. Something is terribly wrong. These statistics tell us that this bureaucratic, top-down, colonial approach is not working. It is a total failure. After reading yesterday's *The Globe and Mail*, I probably have to correct that. There was a little item in "Morning Smile" which stated: "nothing is ever a total failure—it can always serve as a bad example".

What we have with the Indian conditions in this country is a national disgrace. This national disgrace puts a severe strain upon our international credibility. The report of the Special Committee on Indian Self-Government in Canada, to which I now want to refer, deserves careful study and consideration. I want to pay tribute to the Members of Parliament from all political Parties in this House who worked with me in the production of this document. I also want to give special thanks to the three Indian members who served in an *ex officio* capacity. They made a very significant contribution to the findings in this report and to the recommendations.

The report has been well received by Indians and by non-Indians alike. It is a positive response to the fair, just, reasonable and legitimate aspirations of Indian people in Canada today.

This report was not conjured up by a group of Members of Parliament sitting in a committee room in the West Block, dreaming up some ideas that would be good for Indians. It is based on the testimony that we received in one full year of public hearings across this country, listening to Indian leaders and to people who live in Indian communities. We took that testimony, digested it and put it into language that can be utilized by Parliament and by the Canadian people. The report is based soundly on the testimony that we received.

I want to thank this Parliament for having given to this Special Committee terms of reference that were broad enough to enable us to do a comprehensive job. I want to thank this Parliament for granting us the necessary funds so that we could carry out what I consider to be a monumental task.

What, then, are the fair, just, reasonable and legitimate aspirations of Indian people in this country? What is it that Indian people want and have a right to expect? First and foremost, Indians want to have Indian forms of government recognized in Canada, constitutionally, and, if necessary, in the interim by legislation. Let me remind Hon. Members that Indian people governed themselves quite acceptably long before Europeans set foot on these shores. Long before the Europeans came here as explorers and later as settlers, Indian people were governing themselves. One of the world's great anthropologists, Claude Levi-Strauss, has described the Indian culture of the northwest coast of British Columbia as one of the great efflorescences of mankind, fit to be compared with the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Let me say to my hon. friends in this House that Indian people are governing themselves today, but in governing themselves they are being controlled and manipulated. Their aboriginal right of self-government is eroded, undermined and diminished by the Indian Act and by the Department of Indian Affairs. Indian people want their forms of government to be recognized so that they may direct, manage and control their own affairs. Is that so radical or revolutionary? Is that so unacceptable to thinking men and women who make up the House of Commons today? Surely not.

Let me just summarize this report in a sentence. If I had to put it in one sentence, I would describe it this way: All and