

*Indian Act*

tions. We have heard that it could result in chaos if the Charter comes into effect and we have not dealt with this provision. At any rate, April 17 is a very important psychological date that all Members of Parliament have to work toward in order to have the discrimination removed by that time.

At the same time, we do not want to rush the job and botch it as we were forced to do the last time. I want to stress the importance of full committee meetings, the importance of the committee being able to hear all sides of this issue so that we can do a good job. I and other members of the committee will be giving a great deal of time in the next few weeks to hearing from different segments of the Indian community, hearing their views on this very important legislation. For that reason, we want to get it out of the House today and into the committee as soon as possible.

**Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to begin by complimenting both the tone and the content of the speakers who preceded me, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Crombie), the Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior (Mr. Penner) and the Hon. Member for Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands (Mr. Manly). That tone indicates not only their own interest but is also an indication of the seriousness with which this historic matter is taken by all Members of the House. Indeed, this is one of the few pieces of legislation to come before this House which can genuinely be described as being historic. It does not solve all the problems, as the Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior made clear, but it is nonetheless an historic and important Bill.

The Bill ends a discrimination against certain women, a discrimination that all of us now find unacceptable. It marks a large step away from a colonial mentality that has scarred the relations between Indian and other Canadians and marks a step—just a step, but an important one—toward greater autonomy for Indian bands. It proceeds in a way that is simultaneously reasonable, tolerant and principled to resolve dilemmas that have been divisive at home and have been embarrassing abroad.

As the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development noted, this is not a Party matter. It is a uniquely profound Canadian question, rooted in the traditions and the rights of our original people, raising the principle of equal treatment, which is at the core of our free society, and resolved by reason, consultation and compromise.

● (1420)

I address these questions in several capacities, including my capacity as Secretary of State for External Affairs. In this 40th anniversary year of the United Nations, I celebrate and commend legislation that brings the laws of Canada into harmony with the international covenant on civil and political rights.

In addition, as the House will know, I have had other incarnations in this Chamber. In October, 1979 I had the honour to include in the Throne Speech of that year a commit-

ment to remove Section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act. Then later, on November 20, 1981, I had the honour to move the adoption of the paramountcy clause, Section 28, of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In another capacity, my most important capacity as an individual Member of the House of Commons, more than a decade ago in the company of the present Minister of National Defence (Mr. Nielsen), the present Minister of Employment and Immigration (Miss MacDonald) and the former Member for Skeena and others, I was part of a parliamentary committee that for the first time in the life of Parliament achieved agreement between Members of the House of a definition and acceptance of aboriginal title.

The real reason I rise now to offer counsel to my colleagues here and my friends across the country is that those of us who know the emotions this question can arouse have a special obligation to bring balance and understanding to this debate, as all of the participants so far have done. This Bill is about more than an end to discrimination. It is also about a practical beginning to local band control of local band affairs and the challenge has been to respect the principles of equality and autonomy at the same time. It would be relatively simple to embrace one principle and abandon the other. It would be simple, dangerous and a betrayal of our elemental duty to bring Canadians together and to help all of our people understand the complexities of our country.

Questions concerning the equality of women are better understood today than they were a decade ago but there is not yet as wide an understanding of the special sense of community of our Indian people and the importance they place upon defining and controlling their own identity. In addition to suffering more than their share of disease, indignity and early death, they have for a century had their destiny controlled by others.

The children of the Eden Valley Reserve west of my home town were as free as I was to run, to ride and to be children. However, when we stopped being children, the youngsters of Eden Valley were not as free to be themselves as the youngsters of High River because to be Indian in the land which the Stoneys, the Blackfoot and the Cree discovered was to have your life run by someone else. There is somewhat more freedom now for the Stoneys, the Cree and the Blackfoot, but their memory and our legacy was of Ottawa running Indian lives, Ottawa setting Indian standards.

Against that background, Members of the House can understand why local Bands were worried about proposals to have Ottawa again change their traditions and define their members. To many Canadian Indians, the principle at stake was not the equality of Indian women but the autonomy of Indian bands. Our challenge in this Parliament is to respect both principles together, to end the discrimination that everyone agrees should end and to reinforce the autonomy and identity of communities that were treated like colonies for a century.

This Bill is the result of careful and sensitive consultation across the country. The Minister has invited Members to come to committee with proposals they might think better. On this