

## Oral Questions

[English]

**Miss MacDonald (Kingston and The Islands):** Mr. Speaker, I still feel that the government is abdicating its constitutional responsibility. May I direct a further supplementary question to the minister. In view of the three different positions taken by cabinet with regard to the claims of the James Bay Indian people as outlined in the memo to cabinet of July 6, 1972, the first being that of "alert neutrality" on October 21, 1971, the second being that of "being a party to the negotiations" on May 9, 1972, and the third being that of "restricted to the role of an observer", can the minister say which of these three now is the position of the government?

**Mr. Chrétien:** Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are being less paternalistic than some other people would like us to be. We have always followed in all circumstances the wishes of the Indians and have assisted them as often as possible. When they decided to go to court to defend themselves, I gave them some help and I am ready to help them in all possible ways. But, of course, I do not intend to be paternalistic, and I know they are capable of defending themselves.

**Miss MacDonald (Kingston and The Islands):** Will the minister acknowledge that the National Indian Brotherhood has requested that the minister assist them in their representations before the courts?

**Mr. Chrétien:** Mr. Speaker, two groups are involved, the Quebec Indian Association and the National Indian Brotherhood. The case in court has been put forward by the Quebec Indian Association and, as I say, I have helped them put their case before the court. I am in constant contact with these people; in fact, I had the pleasure of meeting their representatives about 10 days ago.

JAMES BAY HYDROELECTRIC DEVELOPMENT—STUDY OF EFFECT ON ENVIRONMENT OF NATIVE PEOPLE

**Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, may I ask the minister a supplementary question. Has he caused to be conducted any inquiry into the effect of this proposed undertaking upon the environment, life and habitat of the native people in the area?

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Mr. Speaker, we are aware of the consequences. As for the department which I am heading, we are concerned with the interests of the Indian people and their traditional way of life. We have held numerous discussions with them and we are endeavouring to protect their interests. They have decided to take their case before the court and it would not be advisable for me to discuss the heart of the problem since their case is before the Superior Court in Montreal.

[English]

**Mr. Stanfield:** Has any formal, systematic study been made of the environmental effects resulting from this development, particularly upon the native peoples, and is the minister prepared to make the study public?

[Translation]

**Mr. Chrétien:** Mr. Speaker, the question concerning ecology in this area has been considered and I think that the Minister of the Environment could perhaps answer this question.

[English]

**Hon. Jack Davis (Minister of the Environment):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps I might try to reply to the question of the Leader of the Opposition. We are now in the second phase of studies, the first phase having been completed in the fall of 1971. A summary report was published and widely distributed. There are 40 supporting reports available to anyone who is interested. More detailed studies are now under way at a cost roughly of \$8 million, and jointly financed by the Quebec government and the federal government.

**Mr. Stanfield:** Can the minister indicate approximately when the results of these studies in the second phase will be made public?

**Mr. Davis:** Mr. Speaker, I expect that a number of the studies being undertaken in the second phase will be completed this year and their publication will begin in the fall.

CLAIMS OF JAMES BAY AREA NATIVES—GOVERNMENT POSITION RESPECTING COURT CASE

**Mr. David Lewis (York South):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask one or two questions on this matter. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has told us that the matter is now before the court and therefore he cannot discuss certain aspects of it. But would he inform the House whether the native people affected in the James Bay area asked him before they went to court to carry out the responsibilities that the federal government has under the British North America Act as well as the Indian Act and to represent them in negotiations in order to protect their interest in that area before they were forced to go to court?

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to remind the House that the Indians themselves came to see me and asked me to help them take the case before the courts; I used my authority to give them the funds required to retain the services of the best legal advisers they could find. We gave them all the information they requested. The Indians never asked me to take over their case. They themselves decided to take it before the courts, and I gave them all the help I could.

[English]

**Mr. Lewis:** In view of the responsibility of the federal parliament and government to protect the Indian people in that area, both under the act that gave that area to Quebec and under other statutes, has the minister given consideration to his responsibility to be in court to support the position of the native people in that area instead of merely providing them with legal assistance?