

Indian Affairs

ans in this land. That is why it is not possible to do anything too quickly.

What I have always avoided doing is creating a situation in which we appear to promise the Indians that we can solve all their difficulties in one shot. That would be misleading. For too long the Indians were told so many things, given so many undertakings, promise and commitments which were not carried out.

Mr. Yewchuk: Especially in the last five years.

Mr. Chrétien: Look at the facts. In the last four years the committee has researched some of the problems thoroughly and come up with a number of good solutions. They took the work seriously and there was very little partisan politics in that committee. Perhaps I used too strong an expression when I spoke on the television program, but I do not believe that five minutes after receiving a brief certain members of the committee should accept it in its entirety without analysing the implications. That is not in accordance with my concept of the way in which a committee should function. It serves no purpose except to score political advantage. I should like the committee to consider all the aspects involved, more especially since, I am happy to say, there is not a member in this House who does not think the wrongdoing of the past should be corrected.

This is what we are doing at the present time. This is the purpose of our discussions with the Yukon Indians, with the Indians of British Columbia and elsewhere. In Quebec, of course, the case is before the courts and it is difficult for me to comment upon the situation. I think the action taken by the Indians there is the consequence of a mature decision reached among themselves. They kept me informed all along of what was happening, and I kept them informed all along of my intentions. They decided to go to the courts and I am satisfied they have put forward a very impressive case. It is up to the courts to decide the issue.

I would not reverse the position I have taken all along that the Indians in Quebec and elsewhere have been reasonable. They have not systematically opposed any development. They wanted participation. They wanted compensation. They wanted meaningful opportunities as a result of this development. And since the Quebec government did not come through with proposals positive enough to satisfy them, they decided to fight their case in the courts. We, as a government, have helped them—and the Indians have not complained about the help given to them. When a decision is made by the court, our advice will be available. It would be premature for me to say anything further at this time, except that in cases of this sort it is better to settle out of court than to go to court. I say this because I think a good settlement is possible, one which will bring advantages to both parties.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I should not like to go on speaking, knowing that many hon. members want to express their views.

As I said at the start, we have already made great progress in recognizing all treaty Indians. We have said and we repeat that we intend to observe those treaties and fulfill our commitments and in such cases where we did

[Mr. Chrétien.]

not do so, or cheated the Indians the government has stated that it will do its very best to right these injustices. That is why Commissioner Barber and myself are ready to deal with any cases submitted to us in due time and place, and we have already begun to do so.

Concerning non-treaty Indians, on the basis of the rights acquired by them in 1763 as a result of the Proclamation by King George III, the government feels that their problems must be solved equitably. This is a new start in that field, something that has never been done before. We have already started negotiations with the Yukon Indian Association. We have started discussions with the government of British Columbia with a view to setting up tripartite consultation mechanisms to solve the problem of the rights of the Indians who did not sign a treaty in that province.

I trust that different situations elsewhere in Canada can be solved through negotiations based on the fundamental principle of the Proclamation of 1873 which gave the Canadian government instructions that we must follow. That is why we have undertaken negotiations with some Canadian provinces which we intend to pursue until such time as we can collectively offer the Indians, as all other Canadians, an acceptable solution.

To my mind, Mr. Speaker, the members of the committee on Indian affairs and northern development were right in wanting to study this document in depth, to hear the views of several experts on the matter, instead of merely trying to use this controversial debate to score a few political points.

I for one feel that the committee should go back to work and study once again the overall effects of this document. I know the advisors of the government and others have—

• (1700)

[*English*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I regret to interrupt the minister, but the time allotted to him has expired.

An hon. Member: Carry on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Has the minister permission to continue?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not agreed.

Mr. Stanfield: I do not want to be difficult, Mr. Speaker, but perhaps we could give the minister another minute.

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say that I should like the committee to make a thorough study of those concepts and to look at all the implications in the different provinces in order to see what can be done in a non-partisan way. After all, there is nothing to gain from being partisan. I wish the House of Commons and this parliament would deal very seriously with the question and back me up if I do something that is right. During the five years I have spent in my present department, I have not found things too easy. But with the help of the House we may still make a lot of progress in this field.