

*Indian Affairs*

part of this country, and obviously, their reaction was the same as mine. It is all the more incomprehensible because the government had achieved a dialogue with the Indian people of Canada. There had been gradually built up over the past few years a basis for understanding and mutual respect which gave promise that at long last the government would produce a policy, approved by the parliament of Canada, that would overcome the grave mistakes to which I have referred.

Just to review the matter briefly, the fundamental error, of course, in the treatment of our first Canadians was the establishment of the reservation system, or the ghetto system, which destroyed the Indian way of life and unfortunately, by the very nature of ghettoism, made it impossible for them to become a part of the developing Canadian way of life. This created a situation wherein our Indians, who have a proud culture and heritage, became a marginal people. They were neither Indians nor Canadians; they were subject to discrimination and isolation, with the result that up until about two decades ago they were often referred to as a vanishing people. The only reason they were vanishing was that they were being decimated by disease by reason of many years of neglect.

The government of Canada at long last accepted its responsibility to our Indian citizens and in the past two decades, rather than being a vanishing people the Indian population of Canada has become one of the fastest growing segments of the great Canadian mosaic. There has been progress, as I say, in other areas over the past two decades. For example, just ten years ago the Indians received the fundamental right of citizenship in this country, the vote. Just as recently as that a new educational approach was adopted whereby it was possible for at least the children of our Indian citizens to break through the barrier of segregation on the reservation ghettos and attend school with other Canadian children in the normal community situation in this country. As recently as this there has been an attempt to encourage Indian citizens living on reservations to accept more and more responsibility for handling their own affairs, in the hope that eventually the reserves will become self-governing communities on much the same lines as normal municipal organizations.

In the midst of this progress toward the assumption of full citizenship and all the rights pertaining thereto, the minister arouses a storm of protest by his premature, arbitrary announcement which has come under debate

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

in the house this afternoon. The situation is quite different from that which used to exist. As a result of the granting of the universal franchise to Indian citizens they have become more keenly aware of their rights and responsibilities. The new educational process has produced a generation of leaders who are no longer content to sit by and be regarded as nonentities to be manipulated by the representatives of the Great White Father. In other words, paternalism which was the curse of the reservation system has long ago gone by the board. This new leadership is represented by men whose names have now become well known in public affairs in Canada, particularly the presidents of the various provincial brotherhoods and the president of the National Indian Brotherhood.

Just a month ago there was a major breakthrough in the province of Manitoba. This breakthrough in the area of economic responsibility was achieved by Chief Dave Courchene, who is one of the prominent, capable leaders of the Indian community today. The provincial government agreed to make it possible for Indian communities themselves to have full responsibility for community development programs in the province.

• (4:40 p.m.)

The lack of wisdom in the minister's premature announcement is manifest by the fact that there has been universal condemnation on the part of these newly emerged responsible Indian leaders of the announcement that has been made. There has been failure to consult in detail or, worse still, it has been the attitude of the government and of the Indian Affairs branch to completely ignore consultation that has been taking place over the past few months. It almost goes back to the situation that occurred a year ago which caused so much confusion and consternation among the Indians and became a *cause célèbre* across the nation when the government decided to arbitrarily remove long standing medical benefits without any preliminary consultations with the Indians themselves. The government backed down from its decision, the breach was healed as a result of special meetings and consultations, and this seemed to have been a salutary lesson for the government.

However, the same mistake is now repeated, unbelievably, inexplicably and incomprehensibly, by the minister. The announcement he made—and this has been pointed out by other speakers this afternoon—ignores the fundamental issue of aboriginal treaty rights,