

Indian Affairs

Columbia land claim submitted by the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs and which has been sitting on his desk since last July having had no formal answer or analysis? I know he has talked to the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs. I also know that the Prime Minister has said, "Perhaps you have more legal rights than we thought you had when we did the white paper". But what kind of answer is that? Has he really looked at the moderate, reasonable position put forward by the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs? It is not the type of extremist statement he attributed to B.C. Indians on national television. Here are some quotes from their brief:

We are asking for compensation for loss of those rights of occupancy and use of lands for which loss we have never received compensation and for adjustment of the compensation in those few cases covered by treaties where the compensation was inadequate.

We rely on the sense of justice of the Canadian people and believe that Canadians will insist that their government recognize and deal with our claims because it is just. We have been deprived of valuable rights which we used to enjoy exclusively and of right, and have been deprived of them without compensation. That is not just.

We have not set a total value on our claim. Our suggestion is that the claim be accepted in principle and that machinery be established by which it can be valued in detail. And that an award or awards be made of the amount so established.

That is what I call a responsible statement. We were pleased when the government agreed to arrangements for a negotiated settlement with the Yukon Native Brotherhood. Their claim was presented in February. The B.C. claim was submitted last July and they are still waiting.

If the minister wants further indication of the responsibility of the Indian organizations, perhaps he has read the statement to the committee last night of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, who said they seek redress for unfulfilled treaties through negotiated settlement via an appeal to parliament for fair and reasonable compensation. Their presentation was heartily applauded by all members of the standing committee. And what did it basically involve? A recognition of aboriginal title and compensation for those reserves which have been lost to them over the years, 98 such reserves, regardless of their original treaty rights.

Let me briefly commend the chairman of the committee, the member for London West (Mr. Buchanan), for his clear and forthright statement in London ten days ago when he said that the federal government should recognize the claims of Canada's aboriginal peoples to lands never ceded to the white man through treaties. The native people have a moral claim the government must recognize, the chairman said. I say he is a credit to his party and his committee.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): That is what we have been talking about—the recognition of the concept so long accepted which will culminate not tomorrow, next week or next year but over a long period of negotiation. In our treaties, under our revered British jurisprudence and through Canadian court decision this valuable concept was never in doubt until this government's white paper of 1969.

[Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands).]

Mr. Speaker, I ask you, what are the alternatives before us? One is to continue the present system. This involves making a people increasingly dependent on a giant bureaucracy which, regardless of its good intentions, has not produced any long-term solutions to an increasingly important issue or seen any significant maximization of the potential of our native people. Are they satisfied with their present status? Are we? Why should they suffer a mortality rate five times the rate for all Canada? Why should their average life expectancy be half that of other Canadians? Their housing is hopelessly inadequate and overcrowded. Their school drop-outs are double those of non-Indians. Their unemployment rate is 80 per cent during the winter and 60 per cent in the summer. Surely the costs, social costs like these, are far more difficult to bear than the settlements the native people seek.

I express my thanks and congratulations to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and to the Secretary of State for the encouragement they have provided in helping the native organizations create the remarkable cadre of leadership which is now emerging. The organizations are now of a calibre where they can produce their own research, their own negotiating teams and their own goals for their people.

• (1550)

There is a second alternative. We must see the settlement of native claims as giving the possibility for laying honourable and decent foundations for the future of native communities. It gives us the chance to put the relationship of the government and the native peoples on the basis of rights, not charity. It gives us the possibility of making social capital available for native communities themselves, under their own control. That gives hope for viable, proud and functional native communities, which surely is the common goal we must all strive for in this country.

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, this is indeed an historic day because, so far as anybody knows, it is the first time a formal proposition has been made to the House in respect of aboriginal rights on which there can be a vote. I think we should appreciate the decision made in the country on October 30 last. At that time the people of this land said they did not want a continuation of the power play concept in parliament and placed upon us the obligation to search ourselves diligently for solutions to many of the long-standing problems people have had, but which have been ignored, and the need to recognize that aboriginal rights fall within this category. Had it not been for the decision of October 30 which resulted in a House of Commons of this construction, I suggest we would not be dealing with this subject matter in this way.

The competition for office that took place prior to the last election resulted in the Conservative party moving from a position of aloofness in this matter to one of commitment.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Howard: Hon. members say "Oh, oh" about that, but if they look back a number of years they will find that the Conservative party was aloof and apart from this simple question. As a result of that campaign and the election of