

*Indian Affairs*

inces, as was the case with the medicare program.

With regard to the Indian people themselves, the statement of the government very nearly treats as irrelevant the issue of treaty and aboriginal rights which the Indian people consider paramount. The government takes the position that the issue concerns which level of government is to deal with the Indian people. This seems to be the fundamental concern of the government. To the Indian people themselves, one very hot and important issue concerns the rights that they will be able to enjoy as a result of treaties, traditions and other settlements. This matter is one to which there is no easy answer. However, it cannot be ignored, and it is clear that the Indians are very concerned that the government may be trying to ignore it.

In passing, may I say that it has been reported that the proposed trip west to be made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) does not include a visit among the Indian people, which I think is not exactly reassuring to them. If that report is correct, then I hope the oversight will be corrected.

Here again the government's procedures seem to be very much at fault. There has been a long process of consultation with the Indian people, but in many ways the real question is how much effective consultation was had. Certainly, there is a suspicion among representatives of the Indian people that the government had decided upon its course before the consultation began, and proceeded on that course regardless of what was proposed by the representatives of the Indian people.

Frequently throughout the consultations the question of treaty and aboriginal rights was raised. It was raised again dramatically at the final consultative meeting that was held in Ottawa this spring. No government that is seriously concerned with knowing what the Indian people want could have conducted those consultations and then have produced a report in this form. As well as appearing to ignore the matter upon which the Indian people placed emphasis—perhaps it was not exactly ignored, I do not want to exaggerate the position, but I think it was downgraded—the government focused its attention on a matter that was raised seldom, if at all, in the nationwide series of consultation meetings. I refer to the proposed transfer of responsibility to the provincial governments.

I want to emphasize my concern about the position in which the Indian people would

[Mr. Stanfield.]

find themselves if the responsibility for their future welfare and development were transferred to the provinces without a continuing responsibility of some sort being accepted by the government of Canada. We all recognize that many of our Indian peoples have very serious social and economic problems which will require a highly integrated program to overcome, calling not only for co-operation from the Indians themselves but also for a highly co-operative effort on the part of various governments in this country.

In terms of talking about equality and justice, it seems to me a vast oversimplification to assume that total responsibility for the Indians can be turned over to the provinces, particularly without any real assurance of adequate financial support from the federal government. While some of the provinces might be capable of discharging this responsibility, there is no particular reason to believe at this point that all provinces would be capable of discharging it.

The minister's method of introducing policy changes may seem to involve the abolition of the Indian Affairs branch, which as a goal I gather has general approval. I do not hesitate to accept this to the degree that it is capable of achievement, but there is some real doubt that other arrangements will be made that will be adequate. The objections of the Indian people are one indication of the difficulty. As the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) said on June 25, as reported at page 10583 of *Hansard*:

● (3:40 p.m.)

While the Indian Act and the federal authority have been unpopular, they have also been familiar. Their proposed removal will raise questions and concern about Indian lands and other rights. In some cases the Indian people may not welcome the prospect of having to rely upon provincial authorities.

The predictable reluctance of the provinces to assume responsibilities they feel they cannot afford, and with respect to which the federal government has not made adequate arrangements, constitutes another difficulty. Of course, I appreciate that the Hawthorne report recommended, after extensive study of Indian matters, that the Indian affairs branch should continue in some form. One of my motives in speaking this afternoon is to urge on the federal government the idea that it must continue to accept responsibility and involvement in this area. If the minister accepts that position then I, in turn, cannot accept a program which involves the complete