

*Indian Act*

Member for Cochrane-Superior (Mr. Penner). He is a past chairman of the Committee and he acted very responsibly and took his duties seriously. We assisted in the matter of the James Bay Agreement and other problems across the country. As everyone knows, we are popular when we take on the bureaucrats for the way they spend money given by Parliament to the Minister. However, from time to time this House gives the committee legislation which does not make us too popular with the people we have to represent.

I noted that the Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior said that we had something analogous to gunpowder. I looked at it as kind of having a tornado by the tail because it was always twisting. As we brought witnesses before the committee, they gave emotional testimony as to how this Bill was going to affect them as communities and as individuals, and then another witness or group of witnesses came before us and said that if we did that, it would affect them in such a way and we simply could not take that advice.

Each day we went through that kind of testimony from various bands across this country and their representative organizations. The committee tried to take that testimony seriously. We tried to deal with it in a manner which we felt would best accommodate the various interests and yet not harm the communities too much. I want to commend the members of that committee for doing what I feel was an excellent job. I also want to say to the Minister that we appreciate the work he did. He was available when we needed him, he was flexible, and yet he tenaciously stuck to his principles. Knowing that the Cabinet and the Minister had certain principles they were not going to deviate from was helpful to the Committee.

As we look back over the history of the past 100 years, we know that governments were reluctant to deal with these problems because they were difficult. This Minister inherited a problem which had to be dealt with because we adopted a Constitution and society said it was time to deal with this problem. Bill C-31 was brought to the House and went through various stages, and we are now in the final stages of passing those changes in the House of Commons.

As was stated by the previous speaker, it is not that those who opposed the Bill are for discrimination. That is not the case at all. The concern is with regard to the impact of this legislation. There is concern about people who will return to their communities after not having been there for a long time. There is concern about the resources that have been available to try to build a life for the people who stayed in the community. There is concern about whether the Government will provide sufficient resources if new people decide to move to the reservations.

● (1640)

I know that many individuals here would not be happy if the Government attempted to impose changes on their community without proper negotiation and settlement beforehand. In committee and over the years we attempted to consult with the people involved. Parliament acted with good intentions. How-

ever, I agree with the Member for Cochrane-Superior that it is not the same as negotiation and agreement. We are dealing with a jurisdiction that has never been given up by the Indian people of the country. One wonders how a legislator can accept responsibility for them. Yet, laws which have been passed in Parliament have assumed that jurisdiction. They have assumed that the Parliament of Canada had responsibility for the Indian people of the country.

I know that there will be difficulties with regard to the removal of discrimination and that problems will be caused for bands as people return to the communities. I also recognize that the starting point for allowing Indian people to resume responsibility for their own government is contained in this Bill.

I enjoyed the year and one half that I spent touring the country on the special committee on Indian self-government. We went from province to province, reserve to reserve, and community to community listening to testimony. We then worked diligently to put that testimony into a report. Now that Parliament has dealt with this law, I hope that the Government can move quickly to be as helpful as possible to Indian bands across the country. I hope that the Government can move quickly to return the responsibility for self-government, which they never gave up, to the Indian people.

The message that I want to leave here today is that I hope the committee can now get on with that work. I believe that we have done the best that we can to deal with this legislation in a fair manner. Members from all sides of the House have contributed to it. Amendments have been accepted from all sides of the House in an attempt to make the Bill even better. I agree with the Minister and other Members who have spoken that now is the time to reconcile the differences and to get on with the very important job of restoration of self-government to Indian people across the country.

**Mr. Taylor:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to make one or two comments in connection with this matter. As a Member of Parliament I represent three tribes of Indians; the Blackfoot, the Sarcee, and the Stony. I believe that a Member should reflect the thinking of the people who send him here. My Indian constituents are strongly opposed to the Bill. They look upon it with fear and trembling.

They say that they signed Treaty No. 7 with the Queen and accept that as gospel. The Queen gave them the right to operate their own reserves without outside interference. They are the master in the reserve, the same as a father and mother are masters of their own home. They object to the assumption that we now give them something which they believe they already have. The chiefs and band councils of all three of these tribes look upon the passage of this Bill with fear and trembling.

At present there is a lack of housing on the Sarcee reserve. The chief estimates that 500 people may come on to the reserve in addition to the 750 who live there now. What will the situation be? There is a lack of land. Will we create reserves within reserves, or will we extend the reserves? Many