

Government Orders

In many instances they are not concerned about their people. They are concerned about their personal well-being. They are making sure they are well off while the rest of the people in those communities are left to suffer and are hung out to dry.

• (1300)

That is why the aboriginal people in British Columbia voted against the Charlottetown accord. That is why they do not want self-government. In spite of all the grandiose statements by people like Ovide Mercredi, the federal minister of Indian affairs and the minister of aboriginal affairs in British Columbia, these people do not want it and it should not be shoved down their throats. Their individual rights and equality should be respected by the Government of Canada, not abrogated and trampled on.

Ms. Hedy Fry (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the last speaker was concerned about the word ignorance. I would not use that word but would use the term misunderstanding and misinformation.

I have heard members of the third party mention a few things which I perceive to be a complete misunderstanding of what this commission is being set up to do. A question was asked about whether the commission had any role to play in making sure that the parties were ready to negotiate. There was no understanding that was a role.

I will read very quickly the role of the commission: "The duties of the commission are assessing the readiness of the parties, Canada, B.C. and First Nations, to negotiate". A clearly stated duty is to encourage timely negotiations. Therefore, with respect to the concern over stalling, that is something the commission is set up to ensure does not happen.

Another comment from members of the third party was that everything was being done in secret, nothing was being done in the open. The role of the commission is to prepare and maintain a public record of the status of negotiations.

I have another comment with regard to constant references to being Canadian together rather than apart because of race. This is a clear denial of the cultural heritage of people who do not belong to a majority group.

One of the things I clearly saw as a physician when we discussed aboriginal health issues was that the aboriginal people had a great deal of health problems. This was because their culture had been denied for so long. The lack of spirituality which is an inherent part of their culture has led to loss of self-esteem and to hopelessness. This has led to the large number of suicides and abuse we now see in the aboriginal community which have clearly been traced back to loss of cultural identity. These things are important to a people. It does not mean that people are different because they are given their cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is inherently what people are; it is what makes them the way they are.

I am really concerned about those statements. They show a lack of understanding of basic human dignity and human rights.

Mr. Scott (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right in saying the role of the B.C. Treaty Commission is to assess whether the parties are prepared for negotiating.

In the case of one aboriginal group within my riding, the government is entering into agreements for negotiating with hereditary governments, not with elected representatives. People from that community continually come to my office and ask: "Who do these people represent and why is the government dealing with them? Why is the government signing agreements with them? Why is the government going to negotiate with them?" Their rights have been completely ignored in this whole process.

Yes, there are very serious problems in Canada's aboriginal communities. It is not because of a loss of culture nearly so much as it is a complete reflection of the state of the welfare industry which has been built up around native Indian people. This symptom will be found in any community, be it aboriginal or non-native, wherever we go. If people are treated as wards of the state and are forever on a short leash from the Government of Canada, those are exactly the kinds of problems we can expect to find in communities like that.

Perhaps the hon. member could take time out of her busy schedule to come to my riding. I would be more than happy to take her to some of the aboriginal communities and introduce her to some of the people who have serious concerns about the direction in which both the federal and provincial governments are going. They have very serious concerns because they know it is not good for them. They know the government finds it very easy to deal with collectives but has a very difficult time dealing with individual rights and individual responsibilities.

• (1305)

Ms. Paddy Torsney (Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to speak on Bill C-107.

In the House we are usually pressured to deal with immediate problems. We get representations from constituents about existing problems and they want immediate solutions. This is one of the rare opportunities we have in this House to pass this bill and build for the long term health of Canadians, particularly young aboriginal Canadians.

It is also fitting to be here with the member for Vancouver Quadra. Both of us were in Beijing. At that meeting a platform of action was adopted. It particularly acknowledged the importance of including the aboriginal communities in decision making specifically recognizing their knowledge of environmental management, addressing their right to education, to ensure equal access to health care and to acknowledge traditional health care. It is an important step. Around the world people