

Some children will be affected by this bill. For example, what about those children who were taken away from their mother by their white father? Even though the mother may wish to come back to the reservation, the father may not accept it. According to some witnesses, even Indians adopted by white people are entitled to return to the reservations. I do not know how many people will return to the reservations.

What about blood Indians who have never been registered on a list? There are many such people who have spent all their lives in the city. Senator Marchand referred to Indians who have been discharged from the army and who have never returned to the reserve. Senator Fairbairn has said that the bill is a good thing. Senator Marchand thought that at least the bill was a good start. We have to start somewhere. Canadian Indians have been governed by the Indian Act for a long time. This bill introduces change and a new start. There was not much debate in the House of Commons on Bill C-31. Some elected members who are well informed on Indian Affairs could have at least said something about the Indian Act.

I would like to see the bill pass. However, if it comes to a vote, I am afraid that I will have to vote against it. I do not like the effect this bill will have on families. It will take some time to determine whether this bill has been good for the people.

The bill comes up for review in two years' time. Perhaps at that time some clauses will have to be changed. There have been many changes to the bill since it was introduced in the House of Commons on April 17. Politicians always say, "It is good for the people." However, that is no indication of what effect the bill will have on our people in the future. Many Indian organizations would like to have seen amendments made in committee. We can do nothing about it now, because we do not want to have the bill go back to the other place and then come back to the Senate.

● (1550)

Some very good recommendations were made by certain organizations appearing before the committee, but when the chairman, Senator Neiman, asked the ministry representatives whether certain amendments could be made to the bill we were told it could not be done.

In any event, in a couple of years I think we will still be here, and perhaps we can change the bill next time it comes before the Senate. At least we might then be able to make some amendments. However, on this occasion we do not have too much time left, and I can only say that for now I hope Bill C-31 passes in the Senate.

[Translation]

Hon. Eymard G. Corbin: Honourable senators, I sat on the committee which considered that piece of legislation. Thank God, it is an improvement over the legislation they wanted to push through during a previous Parliament. This is a consolation, and I endorse everything that has been said by the honourable senators who spoke before me on the positive aspects of the bill. I endorse specifically the quest for justice towards Indian women. It was about time we remedied the

injustice that had been imposed by white governments for all practical purposes on aboriginal communities.

However, there is something I do not like in the effort made by the minister and the government in the legislative process, and that is the disgusting amount of paternalism that is still to be seen there.

Indians are told:

[English]

"We know what is good for you and you are going to lump it, whether you like it or not. Oh sure, we will deal with self-government some time in the future," but this is a mild step.

[Translation]

It has also been acknowledged that the legislation could have a negative impact, that it will be hard to swallow for many bands, that it will generate unnecessary stress among many individuals, that it may also result in the development of a new caste of Canadians. Time will tell.

Indians have asked for more time, and Indian women have urged us to pass this stage. Well, I had said at the beginning of this exercise that I would rise with my colleagues Len Marchand, Willie Adams and Charlie Watt, and I said I would do this willingly if they gave me the O.K. because I know what it means to live as a minority and to get reforms a drop at a time. We are doing this to Canada's first nations in this age of "Star Wars." We are still in the process of making mini-reforms, drop by drop. Too often we use a paternalistic approach, as in this case.

Surely I will commend the minister and his government for taking that step, because it had to be taken. But as I said, the way they went about it will create unnecessary stress in that community. I am referring in particular to the family reunification aspect, which Senator Len Marchand has dealt with. This is the most disgusting aspect of it all.

As a nation which signed an international convention on the reunification of families, I feel we could have done better. It is my feeling that, had we been willing to give ourselves some more time and consult further with Indian communities, we could have done better. We chose to do otherwise. We said: "It is time to decide." Unfortunately, the taking of such a decision does hurt.

I am not a prophet of evil, I never was and I would not like to be one today, but I foresee very serious complications in the implementation of this act. The Minister and the officials admit it. Once again, we have taken a shady road as regards the constitutional legitimacy of what we are doing now.

The Senate role is a special one: it has to safeguard the interests of aboriginal peoples and of all minorities. So, I am not rising to ask for a vote on this, but I would like to say for the record that I oppose the legislation. I am letting it pass, but with a sorrowful heart. I can foresee what the course of events will be over the next few months.

We will have to bring in changes, and I hope we will have the courage to do so within the shortest time frame possible.