

*Government Orders*

make a decision, and the minority is then asked to come on side. They, on the other hand, will often debate an issue far longer until a consensus is reached. I think these things are important, because I want my colleagues to be aware of what it means to negotiate and hold talks with aboriginal nations. It is also very important to go there first-hand, as I did on several occasions, to try to establish such relations and see how they work. This may be a thankless assignment, but it is also extremely rewarding and, from a cultural standpoint, I must say that rubbing shoulders with them has been an ongoing source of personal enrichment for me.

Now, concerning the bill—I hope you will forgive this aside, but I felt it was important to get it out before launching into the mechanics. What is self-government? A quick definition would relate the “self” to independence, the ability to make decisions in relation to a central authority. This is what will be before us today with the bill. And “government” means the act of governing and providing political direction. So these people will effectively be able to make decisions on very specific points of jurisdiction, which are in the agreement that I will explain later. This is what self-government means to some extent, and I thought it was important to start with a brief definition.

In keeping with the argument I developed previously, no two self-government agreements can be exactly alike. Some people associate self-government with a territorial base, and this is so in the case before us today. Others already have a territorial base and are not necessarily seeking to expand that territory, but rather want to be given specific points of jurisdiction.

• (1840)

Again, depending on their culture, they will ask the government during negotiations to give them back such and such area of jurisdiction—be it education, health care, social services, police or language. These areas may vary from one nation or reserve to the next.

We must understand that there is no general model. It cannot be said that self-government will be handled the same way for all 600 bands in Canada. That is impossible.

I pointed out earlier the importance of knowing their culture, their language and their respect for the environment, that is, their great customs and traditions firmly rooted in their genes, I would say. Some preconditions must be met before this type of negotiations can be entered into. I think the first nations must be willing to take control of their own destiny. The Yukon people that I have met seem to have this will. They showed us time and again that they wanted to plan their own future and get rid of the famous Indian Act guardianship. If the minister and the Liberal

government are to be believed, they want to dismantle the Department of Indian Affairs and revoke the Indian Act.

I think this agreement fits in with the idea of taking control of their own destiny and getting rid once and for all of the Indian Act and the guardianship of Indian Affairs.

There is also a will to respect other people's cultures. I think the Bloc Quebecois has also shown that we were able to understand these people and that they understood us as well. I noticed a little sadness when debate dragged on, but they must understand that we are living in a democracy under a system different from theirs and that, unfortunately, they had to go through the process that took place here in recent days. So I think they are in a position to understand that this is the way the Canadian government operates.

I now want to make a short statement on what I said at the beginning of my speech about the importance of the James Bay Agreement affecting the Cree, as you know, and the Northeastern Quebec Agreement affecting the Naskapi. That is something the Bloc Quebecois must rely on because it was a first, an agreement that was hard to reach, I admit, but so rewarding and important in paving the way for other aboriginal nations.

I want to congratulate Quebec on how it approached these very complex negotiations with aboriginal nations. Not only was Quebec willing to negotiate but it made an effort to understand, as the money it spent on this demonstrates.

We see again that Quebec, to its credit, has a strong value system and that its respect for other peoples is reflected in these agreements. For instance, if we consider the financial impact and what the Government of Quebec contributed through Hydro-Quebec, most of the money in these agreements came from Hydro-Quebec and the Government of Quebec, while the agreements that have been before the House lately include very little in the way of financial input from the provinces involved.

It is clear that the federal government is very generous to aboriginal people outside Quebec, but the situation is different in Quebec, although, we decided to try to reach an agreement with these people in an atmosphere of mutual respect. It took time, and of course there are still the occasional clashes today. There are still some irritants, but I can assure you that on the Quebec side we are trying to smooth out the rough spots.

I think it is important to point out that the James Bay Agreement was a first, an example that was followed by many other aboriginal nations.

• (1845)

In fact, the list of jurisdictional items that are included in the agreement before the House today was already to a considerable extent included in this agreement, and that is why I say that the James Bay Agreement was a pioneer in this respect.