

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—S. O. 82—ABORIGINAL RIGHTS—SELF-GOVERNMENT

Mr. John Parry (Kenora—Rainy River) moved:

That this House condemns the government for its timid and unimaginative approach to the advancement of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, for its continuing failure to offer long term, fair, and just responses to the social, cultural, economic and political aspirations of Canada's First Nations, for its unwillingness to recognize and affirm the inherent rights to Aboriginal self-determination, and for thereby impeding the improvement of the health, heritage and economic well-being of present and future generations of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

He said: Mr. Speaker, in rising today to address this Opposition Day motion, I can say that I am proud of the record of the New Democratic Party in bringing to the House the concerns of the aboriginal people of Canada. That is a commitment of which today's Opposition Day motion is only part, and I want to start by talking in terms of what this motion is and what it is not.

I do not see this motion as one that is narrowly partisan. I will not make a speech that is interlarded with references to the Government's stubbornness, incompetence, or other faults that are real or imagined. However, I believe that in consideration of this motion it is essential that we recognize we are not talking of a particular government at a particular time but of a cumulative failure for which all of us in some measure bear a very real share of the responsibility.

This motion could have been presented in this Parliament at another time. It is my sincere hope that such a motion will not be necessary in the next Parliament. It could have been a motion moved in a provincial legislature now or at another time. After all, we are talking about the cumulative impact of the deficiencies of governments in Canada to which this Government, while it bears a measure of responsibility, is simply an heir and perpetrator.

While we question the record of governments, we also acknowledge the responsibility of Canadian society as a whole. I stress to my colleagues in the House that I do not consider this as a doom and gloom motion. It is not brought forward to say that progress has not been made, nor is it presented on the hypothesis that there is no willingness to make progress. The purpose of the motion is to point out the paramount importance of this last hurdle on what could legitimately be called the trail of tears, as the aboriginal people of Canada struggle to recover those rights to self-determination and self-government which they never renounced but which have in numerous ways, settings and circumstances, been gradually taken from them.

Ours is not a society that should bear a burden of guilt upon our collective back. However, it is a society that should be fully cognizant and understanding of the need for us to act individually and collectively to reverse the history and turn away

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progress in Canada from the objectives which it has unconsciously but so effectively been pursuing.

When I talk about ourselves as a society, I do not say that aboriginal people are not integrally a part of our society, because they are. However, as much as they are integrally a part of Canadian society, so they are also integrally a society unto themselves, as, indeed, are each of the hundreds of aboriginal nations in Canada a society integral and entire unto themselves. Canadian society must recognize the extent to which all the parameters, the framework and structures of society are determined by the settlers and their descendants, by immigrants like myself, and are determined in a framework which until recently has discarded, devalued and derogated the contribution of aboriginal people to Canadian society.

This motion and the debate is not about the Department of Indian Affairs. That might disappoint some of the 59 bands of the Nishnawbe-Aski nation and the Grand Council Treaty Three in my riding who, by virtue of the isolation of their communities— including approximately 20 that do not have road connections— have suffered neglect and do not have access to any of the sort of services which most Canadians are fortunately able to take for granted.

This debate is not about the large sums that have been expended by the Department of Indian Affairs and the modest temporary results from those expenditures. The debate is not about the department as an instrument. It is not about the welfare syndrome in which Canada's aboriginal people have been enslaved by virtue of the unthinking, but not uncaring operations of Canadian society through that department.

• (1550)

It is not even about the terrible record of trusteeship with respect to the lands of aboriginal people, and it is not about the performance of the present Minister. This debate is not about the practice articulated in the secret Liberal Cabinet document in the last Government as a strategy of throwing dollars at problems in the hope that aboriginal people will be quiet. These are failed approaches, and what we are talking about in this motion is the future. It is future oriented and it is about change, about the changes which our society and, indeed, our Governments will have to undergo to validate and bring about the fulfillment of the needs of the aboriginal societies.

This debate is about extensive change. It is about change in fundamental attitudes and about recognizing that the so-called Indian people of Canada are not a single people but are many people, diverse and with great differences between them. It is also even about our own legends and the myth of the two founding peoples of Canada at which we have to look very seriously in the light of the aboriginal people's presence in Canada before the settler societies came. It is about changes, of course, to our Constitution, of which more later.

The stark facts about being an aboriginal person in Canada today are not attractive. The proportion of Indian children in CARE is five times the national average. Twenty per cent of