

Indian Affairs

to go ahead with this program too quickly. We will consult with the Indians. If they have some good suggestions to make we will listen to them. We will send a special team of people to meet Indians all across the nation, to try to find ways for Indians who live on reserves to make their own decisions.

I do not want to have to make decisions for them any longer. But if they suggest that the present system be retained for a period of years I may agree. However, I hope they will realize it is in their own interests to take their future into their own hands. They have many new leaders. During the past ten years there has been a great improvement in the education of Indians. Ten years ago only 15 per cent of Indians received education above the fifth grade. Now, 95 per cent of them go above the fifth grade.

Mr. Stanfield: Would the minister permit a question?

Mr. Chrétien: Yes.

Mr. Stanfield: Is he sticking to his proposal that any grants to the provinces covering the costs of services to the Indian people would gradually be phased out?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I think that it will take some time. I have not negotiated anything, but I hope there will be a day in Canada when there will be no special programs attached to a group of people because of their race.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Chrétien: How long this will take I do not know, Mr. Speaker, but I am ready to negotiate and to discuss it with the provinces and with the Indians. I know the Indians have to catch up. I realize this. It is a collective responsibility of the people of Canada to make sure that they catch up. But we should not deal with these problems simply on the basis that these people are Indians. We should deal with these matters on the basis that they are human beings.

Often the problem of the Indian is the same problem as that of the Metis or of the white people who live in the north. Sometimes it is a problem of regional development rather than a problem of racial development. Anyway we have to correct the situation. It will take some time, but I believe Canadian Indians are citizens of the provinces on the same basis as other citizens, and I want to assure them of that.

I have seen a situation in which a provincial government has refused to build a road

to an Indian reserve simply because it said, "We build roads only for the public." The province did not want to build even one mile of road to reach a reserve. I do not think that is right, because the Indians who live in a province are citizens equal with others within the province.

It has been said many times that Indians do not pay taxes. When they go to buy gasoline, or into stores to buy other things they pay the indirect taxes that all other Canadians must pay. They contribute to the provincial treasuries in the same way as other citizens. I think it is fair to ask the provinces to extend their services to them. Now, we do not want to transfer responsibility. What we want to do is to ask the provinces to treat the Indians as citizens of the provinces, and we are willing to contribute financially to achieve that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: I do not want to press the minister unfairly but I am wondering now whether he expects the Indian people to feel easy about the services that the provinces, particularly some of the provinces, would be able to provide without a full assurance from the Government of Canada that it will enable those provinces to provide services which are now the responsibility of the Government of Canada, and which services will increase in expense?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I said that we want to contribute, to make arrangements with the provinces, and we will negotiate that. But I hope that there will be a day when Indians within the provinces, will be considered as full citizens of the provinces and will be treated in that manner. I think this is the goal we have to achieve. As I said, the problem is also a problem of regional development. It is not a problem related to the Indians alone. In the northern part of Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the white people who live there often are faced with the same problems. The Métis are often in a worse situation in these localities than the Indians.

● (5:30 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired unless there is agreement on the part of hon. members that he continue.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Chrétien: Thank you. I shall not take too much more of the time of the house. But we do want to discuss these possibilities with