

Supply

Indian matter with some mistrust. On one hand, you emphasize all the nice promises, and on the other hand, you put obstacles on their way and, you make them feel as non-persons. If you wish, I will later circulate some documents and testimonies of those Quebec native women who are not very happy with your government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Questions or comments.
[English]

Mr. Felix Holtmann (Selkirk-Interlake): Mr. Speaker, as I stand today to address this motion, Mr. Speaker, I am indeed tremendously shocked. We have heard Hon. Members of the Opposition today describe how they feel that our Government has let the native people down some garden path. That is a totally insane accusation. I can honestly say, Mr. Speaker, that if the members of the New Democratic Party gave us their Regina Manifesto today, we would find that it would not help one single native in this country. However, they do not exactly throw that out in the open because there would not be an economic growth opportunity for natives at all. Those are the facts of life, yet they stand here and condemn the Government for having had more consultations in eight months than had probably taken place in the previous 25 years of Liberal Government. The Members who sat on the committee dealing with the removal of discrimination, which has existed for so many years, heard a large number of witnesses giving testimony. When the previous Government brought in a Bill, which dies on the Order Paper, it involved this much worth of material. But since December I can tell you that we have had that much material, and that is the difference. That is consultation. That is hearing witnesses, the native people who gave us their impression of how we should improve the Bill. They gave us their impression of what was wrong with it. That is the kind of process this Government has undertaken. To say that we have a hidden agenda is to make a total mockery of what happened.

● (1630)

If we look at members of the Liberal Opposition here today, and they are small in number, for 25 years they did nothing but bring the economy of Canada so deeply into debt that we wonder if we can pull it out, even with the greatest amount of effort. They did that to create jobs, but they left us with almost one and a half million unemployed when we started eight months ago. They went from a \$4 billion deficit not so many years ago to a total national debt of \$180 billion. But they feel they can stand up and bring a motion such as this to the floor of the House. It is simply scare tactics applied to the native people who are relying on us to help them regain what they have lost over hundreds of years. This is the attitude which shocks me and my colleagues in the Government, and I cannot stand here without illustrating my deep feelings about that ridiculous motion we have to debate here today.

The motion refers to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Crombie) as the frontline ambassador of goodwill. Will someone tell me what is wrong with having a Minister of goodwill? Should he go around to all the

reserves and have the native representatives come up and accuse him of not having goodwill for them? Should he tell them to go and solve their own problems? Is that what the Opposition is suggesting? Yet it is condemning him for being an ambassador of goodwill. For goodness' sake, what kind of sense does that make?

I have travelled with the Minister and listened to the concern of many Indian leaders. We have listened and the Minister has addressed each and every individual problem. Certainly he has not been able to visit the 500 and some odd bands which exist in Canada, but in eight months he has probably visited more bands, more chiefs and councils, more native organizations, than probably any previous Minister.

That is the consultation process we began, and we are going to continue it. That is what we are here to do. Certainly we are not going to come up with a total solution to every single problem. Certainly the native groups will not have a total solution to the problems with which they come to us. But we have to find a balance. It is not going to satisfy everyone, but if we do not continue on this route, then the Opposition can say to us that we have not acted in good faith. The committee sat for many, many hours trying to work out amicable solutions for all the parties concerned.

Let us just consider Bill C-31 for a minute, and compare it to the previous attempt in Bill C-47, I believe, brought forward by the Liberal Government. Bill C-47 involved a total of just under 20 hours of consideration and some nine witnesses. The Bill was studied for five hours *in camera*, a few amendments were made and it was sent to the House, where it ultimately died on the Order Paper. However, regarding Bill C-31, we have had 52 witnesses and in excess of 75 hours of committee hearings. Can anyone over there honestly say that that is not consultation? Not if you compare it to what there was before, because it makes a mockery of what went on before, doesn't it? This never happened before. Members of the Opposition sat in on those meetings and listened, and even proposed amendments, which we accepted! Yet they sit there and condemn this Government. I say, shame!

We made amendments resulting from witnesses' testimony. If that is not consultation, then I would like Members opposite to tell me how to do it better. We added a new clause to Bill C-31 which says that the Minister shall cause to be laid before each House of Parliament not later than two years after this Act is assented to a report on the implementation of the amendments, which report shall include detailed information on the number of people who have been registered, the number entered on each band list and so on. In other words, we are going to review what we have done to find out if it has had the effect of solving some of these major problems which were created many, many years before. That is a review. We are not saying it is perfect, but we are saying we are prepared to look at it again to see if we can make it still better. That is the review process which I think was lacking so many times before in any legislation which went through this House. Yet we are criticized.