

Indian Affairs

that, such as the constitution, the ability to use their own money and make their own mistakes, that hope dwindles. When we look at the constitution before us, it is dwindling rapidly.

I do not know whether this is a good example, but two years ago I travelled to the Middle East. I visited Palestinian refugee camps. I could see that the people there had no hope. They could not get outside the camps. There were hundreds of thousands of them living on a few quarters of land. They had to exist on ten kilograms of flour, ten kilograms of peanuts and two quarts of olive oil a month per family, plus whatever else they could scrounge, and that was not very much. The United Nations helped with a program to feed some of the children so that when they dropped below a certain weight they could somehow keep them alive.

We ask why they resort to some extremes at times. We are appalled at those extremes. But I will tell you why they do these things. It is because there is no hope. Well, there is still hope for native people in Canada. We have to prove as a government that that hope is there and that we can establish the new policies which will give them that hope. In that way they can go on to become a great community within our confederation or their confederation and ours. We will not do that if we continue with the present policies, and that is why I have moved this motion.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with attentiveness to the remarks of the hon. member for Wetaskiwin (Mr. Schellenberger). May I say that when the official opposition moves a motion of this kind identifying the failure of the government to promote Indian self-reliance and the continued failure to protect culture, language, and the health of Canada's Indian people, I do not think that too much attention has been paid to an awareness of the record and, indeed, an appreciation of the problem.

I do not have to remind the hon. member that his party formed the government for seven or eight months. I suppose I have been minister for a month more than my predecessor in the Conservative government. I listened with some interest to the condemnation in the sense that the hon. member directed it toward government. He indicated that the previous government had moved toward establishing innovative policies respecting self-reliance. I would appreciate it if the hon. member would enlighten me, sometime during the course of the day, on precisely what those policies toward self-reliance were. I can assure him right now that if he would articulate them, I would be more than happy to endorse them.

One thing I do know that the hon. member perhaps failed to note because of his busy schedule, is that there was an agreement in principle arrived at with the Committee for Original Peoples, the Inuit in the Western Arctic under the then minister of Indian affairs and northern development, Mr. Faulkner. I regret talking in the absence of my immediate predecessor. He may have some comments on this. That was a

breakthrough in the sense of agreement in principle with respect to a comprehensive land claim reached with the Inuit people of the Western Arctic which would afford them a land base and economic guarantees for their future well-being. Because it was a comprehensive type of claim settlement, they would have a very high degree of self-government and/or self-reliance. It is something they negotiated and won through the process of negotiation, something which would give them a good economic and social base.

As I understand it, it was the feeling of my predecessor that that agreement in principle should be set aside, or suspended, without any further effort being expended bringing it to a final agreement. I might indicate that one of the first things I did upon becoming the minister was to visit the Western Arctic and the Committee of the Original People, and I indicated that we intended to honour that agreement in principle. I do not view the record of my immediate predecessors with quite the same sense of disapproval and I point out that one example.

• (1620)

The reason I will not point out any more is simply that I find it rather unique, with reference to this department, that when I go before the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development and meet the hon. member, and many others, I sense that there is, because of the intensity of feeling with respect to the condition of the Indian peoples and the urgency with respect to the development of the north, probably less partisanship there than in any other standing committee before which I have had the experience of appearing. In addition to that, various members of the House of Commons in whose ridings there are Indian people are deeply concerned, when they deal with the minister of the day, about working out problems. That tends to undermine excessive partisanship to a very great degree.

I want to indicate a sense of appreciation for the help not only of government members but also of members of both opposition parties, given to me in a spirit of non-partisanship. Along that line, I approached the hon. member and indicated that because so many Indian people are in Ottawa this week, because many chiefs have indicated they wish to see me and because I have a very heavy schedule, particularly over the course of the next few days, I would appreciate his understanding if I cannot be here for the entire day. I spoke to members of the New Democratic Party also, and I appreciate their understanding on that score. If I am away, my parliamentary secretary will certainly be here to note the remarks which are made, and I certainly will study them in some detail tomorrow.

There is a certain lack of awareness of the record. I will endeavour to be somewhat more positive later on in my remarks, but there are certain things which have not been accomplished over the years on behalf of the Indian people, despite funding which has been allocated for the Indian people's benefit.

The hon. member for Wetaskiwin referred to the Indian conditions document. That document was released by my department in June of 1980, and noted that the social, eco-