

Government Orders

nations. There is a problem with that interfacing with the laws of the land as they are today. It is a fact of life that the Government of Canada is here and it has to be negotiated with.

Will the hon. member try to put an answer in the context that what they are seeking for in terms of self-government will in fact comply with the laws we have today? How can we get over that hurdle? What would his response be on that basis?

Mr. Harper (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, certainly the problem we are wrestling with is not as a result of our laws. It is as a result of the laws that were passed here a long, long time ago, well over 100 years ago.

Many of our people have been put outside of their communities as a result of laws that were passed here. If we had exercised our own laws many of our people would still be enjoying the benefits of our societies. When we are concerned about leaving out people or people not being represented or losing their rights, the principles of that will be maintained by our people.

Certainly, when we are talking about self-government structures we cannot operate with the kind of laws that have been put in place. If we did that all we would be doing would be implementing the colonial oppressive policies on ourselves. Therefore, a new kind of system would have to be recognized and a level of government would have to be established in which we would be able to exercise jurisdiction within our own territory.

When talking about justice, whose justice are we talking about? Usually the dominant society has the upper hand in dispelling justice which is quite different from ours in terms of value systems. We could get into a big debate about that, but I certainly think the aboriginal people in their own traditions have maintained the kind of structures that would provide all kinds of rights and benefits to our communities.

I do not see any kind of loss of rights if we were to administer our own jurisdiction in our own territory. I have no hesitation in saying that.

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to rise and respond to the hon. member for Churchill.

This really is what Parliament is all about. I am personally very honoured to have been here for the hon. member's first intervention and to have heard him speak so passionately and honestly about his life, his experiences, dreams and aspirations. Obviously it came from the heart. It is not something I could live; I cannot be in the hon. member's skin. We can learn a tremendous amount from each other.

I want to assure the hon. member, other members in this House and others in our land that our role here is to oppose the government, to challenge its program and to try to ensure that by a spirited and healthy debate we end up with a better solution than we would have had without that debate.

• (1710)

I thank the hon. member for his intervention. I look forward to more in the future.

What would the member do faced with this situation? The situation is that all across the land on reservations there are all of the social ills and the unemployment the hon. member described. How do we go about changing that, not just on reservations but for urban Indians as well?

Mr. Harper (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, first of all we would like to be in a position to make our own decisions. We would like to exercise our own jurisdiction in respect of our territories. At the same time we would expect the government to honour its treaties so that we would have the resources and the financial wherewithal to address and alleviate some of those problems that are so apparent in our communities such as unemployment, the high suicide rates and the economic conditions.

We are not asking for any special funding or to consider anything special. All we are asking is that the government honour its treaty obligations. Housing, medicare and education are under the treaties, just to give an example of what we are talking about.

What is important is that the government tends to make decisions for us and that has to stop. By not supporting this bill I think what is being said is that the hon. member is agreeing to the policy which exists today. What is being said to me is that he is not agreeing with the government's policy and legislation to allow us to make those decisions.

With respect, the amount of dollars we are talking about is very small compared to the spending government has had. As I said, we have been very generous. We are not asking for billions of dollars in this package. We are asking for a very small amount of money compared to the kind of money spent overall.

My first answer is, allow us to control it and honour your commitment by supporting this bill. Actions speaker louder than words.

Mr. Anawak: Mr. Speaker, just a point of order to correct what I believe is a small error. In Canada we have reserves, not reservations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I am not sure that was a point of order. However, the point has been made and I thank the parliamentary secretary for his intervention.