

Indian Affairs

policy are straightforward. They require discussion, consultation and negotiation with the Indian people, individuals, bands and associations and with provincial governments.

This is a statement by a responsible government, earnestly seeking solutions to a problem which has plagued this nation ever since confederation. Today there has been an attempt, and I suggest it is a very shoddy and disreputable attempt, to create the impression that there is some sort of deliberate policy on the part of this government and those who support it, not to work toward the best interests of the Indian people.

Then, we see in the report, under the heading "The Immediate Steps", the following:

Some changes could take place quickly. Others would take longer. It is expected that within five years the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development would cease to operate in the field of Indian affairs; the new laws would be in effect and existing programs would have been devolved. The Indian lands would require special attention for some time.

These are only approximate targets, and may I remind the house once again that the government has said it would be prepared to hold discussions. This is not the time, I suggest, for any political party in Canada to muddy the waters by suggesting less than worthy motives on the part of the government or anybody else. I suggest that the party sponsoring this resolution should not yield to the temptation to till the fields of misunderstanding. It is easy to say that one does not blame the Indians for going on the warpath in the hope that a few more gains will be made, but time would be better invested working constructively with the Indian people and providing them with full equality in Canadian society. This means reassuring them that there are enough responsible people in this parliament who will ensure that their rights will not be flushed down the drain.

● (3:30 p.m.)

It is incumbent upon a responsible opposition to see to it that the Indian people are told this. In view of all the meetings held with Conservatives, Liberals and others in this house not one member of the house could claim that another member is not interested in the problems of the Indian people. It is unfair and unworthy to suggest that somehow some of the members of this house are trying to get rid of a responsibility that is justly and legally theirs.

Having talked with my associates in the Liberal party, I see in the proposed program

possibility for great advances by the Indian people, but only after full consultation as spelled out by the minister in his original statement. The rights that they possess at the present time should, I believe, in no way diminish; and I believe that view is held by every member of the House of Commons.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have this opportunity to make a few comments this afternoon because I was not able to be present in the house when the minister made his statement. However, I did read it with some degree of optimism, though with a number of reservations, and I should like to put these forward in a constructive way.

Mr. Marchand (Kamloops-Cariboo): I have some reservations too.

Mr. Stanfield: I am glad to find a more lively group across the way than was the case yesterday, Mr. Speaker. However, since I am limited to 20 minutes I should like to use my time as constructively as possible.

The contentious part of the minister's proposals concerned the relationships with the government and other groups; on the one hand, relations with the provincial governments, and principally, of course, relations with the Indian people. With regard to relations with the provincial governments, the proposal seems to amount to a transfer of what must be some very expensive functions that are now being performed by Ottawa, functions that it must be the hope of the minister will be improved. However, there is no guarantee that this will in fact happen, because there is no guarantee that a transfer of adequate revenues commensurate with the responsibilities that the minister contemplates handing out to the provinces will be made.

Indeed, the statement made by the minister specifically suggested that the financial contributions of the government over a time will diminish, and then disappear. Such a statement is not likely to be very encouraging to responsible provincial ministers, and consequently not very encouraging to the Indian people.

This, of course, is the same government that promised there would be no more medicare, meaning there would be no more of these unilaterally dictated arrangements with the provinces. Yet clearly this proposal appears to be another announcement of an imposition on the provinces that involves potentially as much expense, and unfortunately as little consultation with the prov-