

Supply

of this House would agree is an honourable and hard-working Member of the House.

It appears to be quite clear now as a result of the RCMP investigation, the content of the document and the strategy revealed regarding the Budget, that there is an entirely separate process going on within the Government that has excluded by design the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. I think one of the most important things we can do to repair that special relationship which we have with our aboriginal peoples is for the Minister to rise in the House today and deal, if he so feels, point by point with what is in the document in terms of a media strategy, in terms of manipulating public opinion. Particularly I think the aboriginal people would like to hear him on the question of title and comprehensive claims, because self-government flows only from title and access to natural resources. If the Minister so wished, I know the Indian and Inuit people would like to hear his views on health matters, education, and what is contained within that document, because the document is a blueprint for probably the most Draconian attack that has ever been proposed to be launched against Canada's first citizens.

Mr. Manly: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague, the Hon. Member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton), a question about the memorandum of understanding that is being drawn up with the provinces.

Could the Member confirm that the document he has suggests that responsibility for drawing up that memorandum should continue to rest with the task force itself rather than with the Minister of Indian Affairs? Could he tell the House what the implications are?

Mr. Fulton: I will try to be brief. The Hon. Member for Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands (Mr. Manly) is correct that the task force has suggested a process for developing these memoranda of understanding which do propose the involvement of a Minister. The Minister who would do it is not named. The document leads into that by very carefully laying out that only 25 per cent of the existing payments, in the neighbourhood of \$3 billion, is considered by the task force in its evaluations to be actual statutory obligations. Another 40 per cent in the document is claimed to be related to matters that are provincial. It mentions that it touches in some way on Section 91(24) of the Constitution Act.

I do not know of any Inuit or Indian leaders in Canada who would like to see a tighter relationship with the provinces within which they reside. They look at Canada as country wherein they have a very special and long-standing relationship with the federal Crown. In fact, some aboriginal people look beyond that to having a special relationship with the Crown of Great Britain. What they have made abundantly clear in their movement toward real self-government and the attainment of title and the attainment of their own government structures is that they wish to maintain a relationship with the federal Crown, but they do not want to become municipal-type structures in dealing with all the provinces.

● (1420)

It is clear within this document that one of the thrusts which is under way right now is to design these memoranda of understanding to transfer to the provinces perhaps 40 per cent—and the document does not indicate it specifically—and perhaps a chunk of the 35 per cent which is discretionary. Perhaps as much as 75 per cent of the programs with which they are presently involved would be delegated to provincial authorities through joint federal-provincial memoranda. Again that is the wrong approach to be taken. The devolution of block funding to bands at the tribal council level should go in stages—title must be resolved, access to natural resources, development and sustainability of their own economic institutions, education, health care and so on, and then a continuing relation much like a group of smaller provinces within the country with the federal Crown. That is the approach which aboriginal people hold very dear. I find that thrust to be one of the most negative principles alluded to in the document.

Hon. David Crombie (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak on the motion before the House today. I had some plans in other parts of the country which I cancelled because the motion of the Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior (Mr. Penner) provides me with an opportunity to set this Government's response to it fairly, squarely, openly and frankly. Let me read, first of all, the preamble to the motion:

That this House condemns the Government for its confusing and manipulative approaches to Indian and aboriginal issues in Canada,—

My submission is that if anyone has confused or manipulated Indian issues in the past week, it has been members of the Opposition. At least they are familiar with how our form of government works. They know that Members of Cabinet are not permitted to comment on matters before Cabinet. Cabinet Ministers can neither confirm nor deny. Had the Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior been appointed Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development by the former Prime Minister when his Party was in power, as well he should have been, he would have had to confront pieces of paper held in front of him and would have had to give the same essential response in carrying out his Cabinet responsibilities—"I can neither confirm nor deny". Hon. Members of the Opposition also know that officials in the Public Service draft, redraft and draft again memoranda and documents by the thousands. Some of them are signed by Ministers. Few of them find their way to policy. Most of them find their way to oblivion and most are rejected as government policy.

In our parliamentary system this whole process takes place within the privilege of Cabinet, and Members of Cabinet, whatever Party is in power, are bound to maintain that process in the most stringent and complete confidence. While we in the House are familiar with the intricacies of these parliamentary notions, many people in Canada are not. By using these tactics I hope the Opposition will not be guilty, even inadvertently, of doing the very thing which this motion accuses the Government of doing, that is, causing confusion and manipulating a system in which Cabinet Ministers cannot respond.