

Private Members' Business

Second, that the Government of Canada may not be exercising its responsibilities to safeguard the economic, social, cultural and environmental rights of all peoples living in this important region of our country.

• (1450)

I would like for a moment to focus on the second point since I have covered the first aspect quite extensively.

The hon. member calls for additional representation, presumably to address a deterioration in conditions faced by native people in northern Quebec. The facts suggest otherwise.

The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement was signed in November of 1975. This was followed by the signing of the Northeastern Quebec Agreement in 1978. Since the conclusion of these two landmark agreements, 18,000 Cree, Inuit and Naskapi living in these regions have received cash and services totalling more than \$1 billion from the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec.

The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement involved an initial compensation of \$225 million. The Northeastern Quebec Agreement provides \$9 million in compensation and a subsequent agreement involved various types of compensation, relocation and related funding totalling more than \$250 million. These figures are significant in their own way.

By themselves, they do not provide the true appreciation of the profound improvement in the quality of life and health standards which the Cree, Naskapi and Inuit have experienced over the past 12 years.

Each village now has its own dispensaries providing first aid care, home visits and community health services. Communities have been divided into independent municipalities. The Cree school board and the Kativik school board are run entirely by elected representatives of the communities.

The James Bay development has actually resulted in considerably reducing the cost of supplies to northern Quebec communities. The existing highway system has made transportation more accessible. Moreover, Cree-owned Air Creebec and Inuit-owned Air Inuit now supply coastal villages from Val d'Or to the Bay of Ungava.

Housing is yet another area where substantial improvements have been achieved. Cree, Naskapi and Inuit families now live in modern homes. Community construction projects are carried out by the Cree, Naskapi and Inuit themselves.

These are impressive accomplishments by any standard of measurement. They offer solid evidence that the aboriginal peoples of northern Quebec have been able to reap significant and lasting benefits from the James Bay development.

Never before have the Cree, Inuit and Naskapi citizens of this region had more control over their own lives, or enjoyed a higher quality of life and health standards, as demonstrated by the considerable population growth in this region in recent years.

The Cree, Naskapi and Inuit citizens of northern Quebec have made some very significant advances over the past decade, both from an economic perspective and in terms of their over-all quality of life.

The Government of Canada is committed to seeing that this progress is not only sustained, but advanced. We will honour our agreements with the aboriginal peoples of this region, as with aboriginal peoples in all regions of Canada.

I would like to suggest in response to the motion by the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce that Parliament wait for the report of the Lortie royal commission that is taking place at the present time to see its recommendation on this important aspect.

I would also suggest that members' budgets representing those areas, are funded in such a way that will make it possible for us to open up riding offices in those areas, hiring aboriginal peoples so we can provide a daily and a more appropriate service for the people of these communities.

I will conclude by saying that in my capacity as member of Parliament for the riding of Manicouagan, I will continue to represent the Inuit people to the best of my capacity.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Ferland (Portneuf): Madam Speaker, I would like to rise today on motion M-415, brought forward by my honourable colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. He referred to the James Bay agreement, signed in 1975, which sought to provide better representation for the people of that region. According to this