

*Supply*

● (1640)

As a Minister I am involved with my cabinet colleagues in a yet to be written chapter of Canadian history, an amendment to the Constitution dealing with Indian self-government. Over the past weeks and months the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn), the Leader of the Government in the Senate, and I have attended a series of meetings with provincial and territorial officials and leaders of aboriginal groups where we were able to prepare for the upcoming First Ministers' Conference. I want to draw to your attention, Sir, that the Government of Canada has provided financial and technical support as well as a motion and a rolling draft all through the 1985 meeting on aboriginal self-government. If we all looked back to the role played by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in trying to bring the provinces and the aboriginal groups together on an amendment, I do not think anyone could question the sincerity and dedication of the Prime Minister and the Government in showing leadership towards acquiring constitutional protection for aboriginal self-government.

We started with a federal framework which was arrived at with the idea that it could gain support from the aboriginal groups and the provincial Governments. Regardless of what my friends on the other side of the House say about what should be put forward by the federal Government, we cannot legislate or ratify self-government for aboriginal people single-handedly. We need the approval of 50 per cent of the population of Canada as represented by seven provinces.

It is not offensive to this Government that after we put forward amendments and rolling drafts, and the aboriginal people put forward an amendment proposal, a province such as Nova Scotia would come forward and draw from both in order to gain consensus. If that does not work, I am sure Members on all sides will say that we hope another province or aboriginal group will be able to take a draft, roll it together, consult, have it accepted and ratified as the Constitution requires. Everyone in this House, including the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Turner), and the Leader of the NDP (Mr. Broadbent), support the entrenchment of self-government in the Constitution. It is not how it is done and who supports it that counts, it is when it is done. As my friend from Cochrane—Superior said, we hope it is done this time but we do not necessarily have the time to wait, and we have been waiting.

The concept of community-based self-government, which has been mentioned in this debate, is something we are looking at on a case-by-case basis. We are looking to individual communities with tribal councils to develop a proposal through which they can present their ideas. I firmly believe, regardless of the outcome of the meetings on March 26 and March 27, that we will continue to work on some of those proposals. It may happen that if we are not successful, there will be more energy needed to speed up the process, to drive it harder. However, regardless of the outcome, there will continue to be discussions on community-based self-government. I feel confident that within the next 12 months there will be several

aboriginal self-government proposals outside of the Indian Act. However, as my colleague from The Battlefords—Meadow Lake mentioned, you can and should proceed only at a pace acceptable to the Indian band, tribal council or Government with which you are dealing. I know that in areas of the Hon. Member's riding there are bands who want programs they have received from the Government under treaty delivered by the Department of Indian Affairs. That will not change until those people wish to have it changed.

When we look at economic development I am not so naive as to think that we can share all the obstacles to economic development among the native people of Canada. However, as Canadians we can make a start. We are doing that now together with the aboriginal people. We are making a start at removing some of those obstacles. It cannot happen overnight and it will not benefit only the aboriginal people. It will benefit all Canadians to have this segment of Canadian society benefit economically.

Just last week in Edmonton we had discussions with over 100 bands who have some form of oil and gas potential on their reserves. That meeting was the culmination of over a year's work by Indian leaders and departmental officials in putting together a more efficient and responsive management regime for the owners of the resource. I am pleased to say there was substantial progress and substantial consensus on the changes which will be needed so that the development of the resource will benefit its owners, the Indian people. As Hon. Members know, this will require legislation. We will need to have changes to the Indian Act. I think we can accommodate those changes.

Looking at the already impressive degree of local administration by Indian bands, and if we can go forward with the management of programs and services being transferred to the Indian leadership, we believe Indians will continue the process of taking over jobs which have been filled by government employees. I do not think that is a bad situation at all.

● (1650)

One of the problems which people address with regard to Indian and federal government relations is that the federal Government provides Indian educational services, child and social welfare, housing, policing and sewage services. In fact, most of the programs and services which are provided to other Canadians by provincial and municipal Governments are provided to Indian people on reserves by the Government of Canada. We hear criticism almost on a daily basis. We hear that the federal Government is not providing sufficient funds to meet the needs and that the Government is trying to evade its obligations to Indian people by transferring its responsibilities to other institutions or Governments. On the other hand, we hear from some critics that the Government of Canada is providing too much money to Indian people.

The criticisms in those three areas are the same criticisms put forward in other areas for which the Government of Canada is responsible. They can be put forward with regard to