

Supply

to self-government should be contingent upon negotiated agreements.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the First Ministers' Conference with aboriginal leaders held in Ottawa in March was the last such conference that Ministers were obliged to hold on this issue under the terms of the Constitution Act, 1982. That conference failed to produce an agreement to recognize aboriginal self-government. I believe the reason for that failure was the lack of political will and leadership of the federal Government on that issue.

Again this morning the Minister of Justice repeated the argument that until such time as there is significant agreement among the provinces to entrench aboriginal rights and aboriginal self-government there will be no further meetings. In other words, what the federal Government is saying to the provinces is, "Show me where you want to go and I will lead you". We consider that to be a vacuum in leadership. We consider that to be a derogation from the position the federal Government should take—

Mr. Benjamin: An abdication.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Abdication is a good word—in furtherance of the historic rights we believe to be inherent of our original peoples. That is not good enough, Mr. Speaker. Quite simply my intuition is that the Government does not believe in the concept itself of aboriginal self-government. The Minister of Justice complains that he has to know right down to the last dot and comma what precisely the concept of self-government means before the federal Government would ever pursue it.

We believe that those rights should be included in the Constitution first as a general statement and affirmation of the rights of our aboriginal peoples, rights which we consider to be inherent, never having been extinguished.

The federal Government, on the other hand, believes that all the details of every application of that right should be worked out first, and only then should that right be included in the Constitution.

Part of the constitutional Accord calls for further First Ministers' meetings to discuss the Senate and the fisheries. We believe that since the fishery is an important aspect of aboriginal rights, native leaders should at least be part of those meetings, along with the First Ministers. I go even further. I would like to see this Parliament add to that agenda to the Senate reform issue, to the fisheries issue, a commitment listed specifically to aboriginal right to self-government and the inherent rights of our aboriginal peoples. That should be added specifically to the agenda by this Parliament and the legislatures as part of the Constitution.

I believe, together with my colleagues, that the right of the aboriginal peoples to self-government has existed for centuries. It existed well before this continent was explored and colonized by Europeans.

[*Translation*]

We believe that this right to political autonomy has always existed and was never abolished. It still exists. It should therefore be written into the Constitution of Canada. At our convention last November our Party passed a resolution asking that self-government for aboriginal peoples be expressly acknowledged in the Constitution.

The Liberal Government headed by my predecessor, Mr. Trudeau, had also acknowledged this right. The Penner report, named after the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior, which recommended working towards the inclusion of aboriginal peoples' political autonomy in the Constitution had been commissioned by the Government of Mr. Trudeau. As a result of the report this same Government had also introduced a legislative measure designed to guarantee political autonomy for Indian nations.

[*English*]

Aboriginal rights were included in the Constitution of 1982 along with the guarantee that those rights apply equally to men and women. There was also the recognition of the existence of rights acquired through both future and existing land claims agreements.

[*Translation*]

Several of these agreements have been negotiated, among other with the Cree-Naskapi of the James Bay region. The federal and provincial Governments were also committed to hold three new conferences—one in 1984, another one in 1985, and the third in March of this year 1987—with a view to reaching an agreement on this question which is of crucial importance to the native people of Canada.

In fact, the present Government is moving backwards, going back to 1982. It simply wants to start all over again. How can the present federal Government think that the aboriginal people will have faith in it? In our opinion, it is simply not satisfactory either for the native people or for the Party I represent in the House of Commons, nor can it be either for the other Members of the House.

We in the Liberal Party are in favour of a constitutional amendment which would take into account the very right, the historic and never abolished right of native people to self-government.

[*English*]

Our First Ministers, we believe, should show faith in the ability of the aboriginal peoples to make their own decisions. They should not take refuge in the status quo, a status quo which has served the aboriginal people so badly and in such a frustrating manner in past decades.

I believe that not only should we have an acceptable amendment enshrining the right to self-government, we must also have a commitment from the federal Government to provide the fiscal resources necessary for the effective exercise of self-government and a commitment to negotiate the necessary agreements and infrastructure.