

*Government Orders*

Chilcotin pride themselves in having been the only native nation in Canada to have fought a war against white people and won.

• (1635)

As you know, all the natives in Canada say they might have fought wars, one side against the other, but in the case of the Chilcotin, it was definitely the case and they are proud of it. They even mentioned the names of warriors who took part in the battle. It was clear to them that the Chilcotin had defeated the white people who wanted to invade their territory, but of course they were unable to hold out for long after that first victory. From then on, there was a gradual invasion of their territory.

Promises had been made to them at that time. It is worth noting that these were not necessarily agreements signed between the Prime Minister, Her Majesty the Queen and some representative of the natives. Even the courts are now beginning to recognize that the verbal agreements and commitments made at the time were legally binding, because natives were absolutely not able to understand—they needed translators to have white people's words translated into their language and white people needed translators to understand what the natives were saying. Thus verbal agreements were binding. Courts are beginning to recognize it.

At that time, those natives were told: "Listen, we recognize the Chilcotin nation, we recognize the Chilcotin Valley as your hunting and fishing grounds". What happened to the Chilcotin has happened to many native communities in Canada.

Over the years, over the decades, over the centuries, there has been a gradual invasion. Today this proud Chilcotin nation is reduced to six small communities on small reserves.

To look at the population figures, I believe that since 1987 the population of these communities has doubled. Now the people are living in cramped reserves, threatened with prosecution by the pulp and paper and forest companies if they go off their reserve to hunt.

There are huge problems, therefore, and the Chilcotin are impatiently waiting for the British Columbia Treaty Commission to get moving to ensure them of the few natural resources remaining to them.

The same situation exists with housing. Sometimes there are three generations living under one roof. The Chilcotin would therefore like to see the negotiating process get not just started up but speeded up.

Another example they spoke to me about, and one in which I have had to intervene, was that the military base in the Chilcotin valley is testing artillery on Chilcotin land. They have been trying without success for years to get this testing stopped.

The situation is therefore this: overpopulated reserves, an inability to have any say about such vital issues as housing and the free disposal of property that ought to be theirs, since they were the original inhabitants, an inability to have any effective impact on a military base which continues to pillage their

natural resources. Needless to say, the Chilcotin are anxious to see the whole thing settled.

They too have agreements, and this is where we see the sense of responsibility among the aboriginal nations. The Chilcotin have an agreement with Fisheries. Some twenty people are involved with fisheries, the salmon fisheries among others. Conservation is primary among the priorities set. The concept of conservation is assured.

Then there is the concept of subsistence fishing, and thirdly there is commercial fishing. The Chilcotin have demonstrated that when they are given these responsibilities not only are they excellent conservationists but they can also obtain their food from subsistence fishing or hunting.

There are many such examples, and there is great anticipation of the day when everything can all be translated into agreements. At the moment, unfortunately, everything is at a standstill.

• (1640)

I will tell you a little later on where I think negotiations have stalled. I believe the federal government has a responsibility, but the Government of British Columbia also has a responsibility. I think both sides have to agree if there is to be any progress, because these aboriginal communities are ready to start negotiations, but we are now seeing obstruction on the part of the Government of British Columbia, and the federal government, instead of putting the pressure on to get things moving again, just sits there and says: "Well, I am going to wait until the Government of British Columbia pulls the switch and starts negotiating in good faith".

The trouble with the Premier of British Columbia is that when he came to power, with the NDP, he was very, very receptive to aboriginal issues. But recently, probably under pressure from the Reform Party, he is starting to say: "Listen—". They started by setting a deadline for the Nisga'a, and they said: "If no agreement is reached by that date, the deal is off". Of course the deadline passed and now all negotiations have been on hold since last summer.

Because of growing support for the Reform Party in western Canada, the Harcourt government is backing down and unfortunately, it is not only backing down but, as I said earlier, it allows this wholesale destruction of natural resources to continue. Meanwhile, the aboriginal peoples have to watch this exodus of natural resources from their communities without being able to intervene.

I also met the Carrier-Sekkani in Prince George. We had a very frank discussion about sovereignty. These aboriginal peoples, although they happen to be in British Columbia, 5,000 kilometres from Quebec, are concerned about the economic and political status of their brothers and sisters in eastern Canada, and I am referring particularly to Quebec. We had a very good free ranging discussion about the sovereignty of Quebec, and I think the Carrier-Sekkani understood that the quality of life of aboriginal peoples in Quebec was clearly to be envied,