

Adjournment Debate

determination. Approximately 98 per cent of the 2,500 Inuvialuit people, an overwhelming majority, voted in favour of the agreement in principle. Part of the agreement in principle was to sign a final agreement by October 31, 1979. What has happened since the Conservative victory? The federal negotiator has not met COPE since May 20. The minister has met COPE twice since his appointment but has not seriously dealt with the agreement and his concerns with the agreement.

Six months after the election the process is no further advanced. COPE negotiated in good faith with the previous government, but is becoming more and more concerned with the minister's refusal to negotiate. In fact COPE alleges that the minister is in breach of the provisions of the agreement. When I asked the minister if he would meet the COPE officers to resolve these differences, he said he was doing this on November 14, but, as I pointed out, the meeting on November 14 was with the counsel for COPE and he said he would be willing to meet with them at a further meeting. I understand that at the meeting with the lawyers on November 14 he did not give his views on the so-called alleged breaches, but he gave a commitment to submit to COPE documentation in writing of his concerns with the agreement by last Friday. Here it is Monday evening and I was told by COPE at a late hour this evening that they have not received those documents as promised.

How can negotiations be resumed when the minister continues to stall? All Indian and Inuit groups are watching the situation very closely, and the government's response and actions will seriously affect all other negotiations, the ITC Nunavut, the Dene claim, the counsel for Yukon Indians, plus specific claims. When I failed to get answers from the minister in the House of Commons, I put further questions to him in the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development on November 13. At that time the minister replied that the Conservative government was delaying its approval because, first, some native groups in the Northwest Territories had made recommendations to him about the claim. I think he had in mind the Dene and the Kititmeot Association, that is, the Inuit of the central Arctic. But as I mentioned to him, he could have signed a final settlement and made provision in it for these objections or fringe disagreements which could be settled by arbitration, as they were with the James Bay agreement, the Montagnais and other groups in the area. Also he said that he received representations from members of the House about the agreement. No doubt he was referring to the member for the western Arctic and the Yukon who are well known for their negative views respecting aboriginal claims.

● (2215)

An hon. Member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Allmand: That is a fact. I heard the Minister of Public Works on Sunday morning, and it was quite revealing.

[Mr. Allmand.]

Finally the minister said that the COPE claim was being delayed while the cabinet reviewed the comprehensive claims policy. We still do not know how long that will last.

Many Canadians, including native groups, consider the policy of the present government to be a complete betrayal of their rights. The credibility of the minister and the department is in serious doubt. In committee the minister failed to tell us what he understood by an agreement in principle. Does he not feel bound by its provisions? Does he think the Government of Canada can set it aside unilaterally? Would he tolerate a native group taking the same unilateral action, if it just elected a new executive?

Today the hon. member for Cochrane (Mr. Penner) pointed out that the Yukon council, because of the new power given it by the minister, passed amendments to the game ordinance whereby virtually they have taken away the hunting and fishing rights of the people in the Mackenzie Delta in the northern Yukon.

Mr. Nielsen: Garbage.

Mr. Allmand: That is a fact. We did not receive any answers to that in the House today. We would like some answers to these questions. We would like to know what the minister considers to be an agreement in principle? Will he respect it? Will he get on with the final agreement in this case and not make us wait forever?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I will try to outline once again to the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (Mr. Allmand) the situation with COPE. He indicated that a telex had been sent on October 31, that it was a black day, and that I have not signed a final agreement. I would suggest to him that he better look at the weather reports again because I received another telex the same day from a community in the Northwest Territories indicating it was a sunny day that I had not signed it. I think the hon. member better check a little closer.

I want to indicate to the hon. member that I had a meeting with the lawyers of COPE on Thursday last, as well as another member who has been representing them constantly, Mr. DeLurry. I indicated to the lawyers at that time my understanding of the COPE agreement and the interim arrangements which relate to the money to be paid by the Government of Canada at fixed periods and in fixed amounts, amounting to \$10 million by 1981. Also I indicated that the lands which had been selected cannot be withdrawn or sold to another group. I asked them whether in the interim arrangements, which we regarded as contractual, the government at any time had breached the COPE agreement. Not only once, but a number of times the lawyer for COPE indicated that the Government of Canada had not breached the interim arrangements of the COPE agreement.

Mr. Allmand: That is not what they said in the press release.

Mr. Epp: I do not mind what they say in their press releases. I am saying that I had a meeting with them. I know what he