

*Government Orders*

easy one for a parliamentarian, especially an Indian affairs critic.

There are other aspects which make being an Indian affairs critic a thankless job. The minister tables a bill for first reading, the same afternoon we receive a stack of documents a foot thick, and the next day I have to rise in the House to make two speeches. Imagine the amount of work, even if we are told subsequently that these documents were in public domain, we have other things to do as well. So not only do we have a difficult job but there is also a tremendous amount of work involved. We are now on our fifth bill on aboriginal affairs in two weeks, C-16, C-25, C-33, C-34, and C-36, and I personally introduced a motion on the north.

Imagine the work we have to do! And that does not include our work on the standing committee. The committee has to go on with its study of the bill. Once again, I thought I would stay up all night only once during this session, but I did so twice, thanks to my friends in the Reform Party, because we discussed the issue all night. Fortunately, the hon. member for Jonquière relieved me at 2 a.m., because the sitting was starting to seem very long indeed, but I tell you that the job of Indian affairs critic is not an easy one.

It is also vital for a critic to explain to his party how important it is to respect and understand the First Nations. And that is not always easy, considering the difficult and volatile context I just mentioned. It is also necessary to show that one has the political will, and I think the Bloc Québécois, by supporting land claims in the Yukon and self-government for aboriginal peoples, has shown that it is prepared to understand these people.

It may be scant consolation but I did find it satisfying to see that, despite all this hard work, I was able to sense the frustration of these people in the Yukon who had to wait 21 years for these negotiations to be concluded. All of the work that we have had to do to reach this third reading stage is nothing compared to the frustrations these people must have felt over the years.

Understanding and respect are important considerations. I have in my office the Indian and Northern Affairs map showing the 600 bands scattered across Canada. Approximately one hundred different languages and dialects are spoken by these bands and first nations. Imagine the wealth of native culture, particularly with respect to language.

As for the environment, in our economic analyses, our environmental concerns have always taken a back seat to other priorities. The opposite is often true for native peoples. We have to understand that the environment often tops their list of priorities. These are important considerations when it comes to adopting a bill such as the one now before us because, as we will

see, the bill's provisions focus at considerable length on the environment.

We also have to understand that in our view of modern economy, the main thing is for shareholders to earn as many dividends as possible on their shares. However, their primary concern is the environment. They are not interested in measures that will enhance or stimulate their economy, because these could harm or endanger the environment. We must also understand this extremely important aspect of native culture.

• (1835)

Last but not least, I want to touch on the question of power or authority. Later on, I would enjoy talking with the people of the Yukon to hear their views on power and democracy, and specifically on parliamentary democracy. We are accustomed to seeing people yell "yea" and "nay" and rise one by one for hours on end. In our system of parliamentary democracy, this is quite acceptable. However, for some this process is hard to understand because their concept of power is quite different.

I can give you some typical examples of what happens on some reserves when negotiations take place. Because we are used to delegating authority, our first instinct is to say: Let us go meet with the appropriate authorities. We come before the band council and to our great surprise, after several negotiation sessions, we realize that the band council is not the only authority on the reserve. First nations have a very different view of authority than we do.

I realized that sometimes the band council says yes one day, and no the next. Why? Because there are other authorities on the reserves with whom we are not in the habit of dealing. Among others, the elders have some authority. We view the elders as important, wise people, but for the natives, it goes much further than that. The elders are responsible for the presence of the others on the reserve and are seen as very wise. Others look to them constantly for advice and counsel.

This view of authority is very important because when a band council has made a decision, the elders may that same day or in the days that follow give their view of the decision made. There are also the clan mothers, a totally different phenomenon than what we have in our society. Native societies are often matriarchal societies, whereas ours is a patriarchal society. We are accustomed to seeing the father as an authority figure, as the one who gets angry and who metes out punishment. The opposite is often true in native communities. Mothers have a great deal of influence, considerably more than they do in our society. Therefore, it is important to design new systems and new centres of authority within each reserve.

We are used to the way things are done here in the House and often in the agencies we deal with. Decisions are made by simple majority. Fifty per cent plus one vote is all that is required to