

Indian Economic Development Fund

approach to socio-economic development to accommodate all. This is not an easy task, but it is not impossible.

In the Northwest Territories, the part of the country I represent, there have been many very big changes in the lifestyle and the economic situation of the native population. The changes have been drastic. They have taken place over a very short period of time, and there have been casualties along the way. I expect there will be casualties in the future as we try to develop a good economic base on which to make a living.

When I think of the big changes which have taken place I think of my grandfather, Dinji Cho, a name which can be translated to "The Big Man". He was born and raised in the bow-and-arrow age. I do not think he met a white man until he was a grown boy. Today his children and his grandchildren are watching coloured television brought to them by satellite. That is a very big change in a very short period of time. When we try to change a culture and bring in different values, there are bound to be casualties, and I am sorry to say that there have been some.

In 1972 in a statement before the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development the then minister, the present Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Chrétien) said, and I quote:

The fur traders, whalers, miners and fishermen who invaded northern regions in the 19th and early 20th century exploited and sometimes exhausted resources for the benefit of distant, non-resident interests. They often showed little or no thought for the well-being or even the survival of the people already there and no concern for what happened to the environment. All they were interested in was getting in, getting rich and getting out.

And usually getting out very fast. That attitude on the part of big companies has not changed.

I cannot help but wonder if anything has really changed regarding that attitude of, for example, oil companies. When I hear the oil companies promising us northerners that a pipeline will solve all our problems, is it any wonder that I doubt that anything has changed? While I do not argue that a pipeline somewhere in the north may be necessary at some time, can anyone seriously suggest that this will help form a stable economic base in Canada's north? To me it is simply a perfect example of the boom-bust syndrome, and boom-bust is not the way to establish a solid economic base.

A couple of months ago I spoke in the budget debate. At that time I wondered if the government was seriously dedicated to socio-economic development. As I said at that time, all the Minister of Finance (Mr. Macdonald) seems to have done is to have fallen into the old trap of giving concessions to the big business community in the hope that it will come through with magical jobs and investment. We have tried that before, and it just does not work well. The Minister of Finance did not seem to understand the unique problems of the north or of natives and other unique groups and regions. If the problems are not recognized in the first place, how, then, can we solve them?

Everyone recognizes that there are basic human needs, included among which is decent housing. Yet many natives are denied that basic human right. They do not have enough

[Mr. Firth.]

houses, and those who do in most cases have houses which are poorly built and crowded. In 1975 only 51.4 per cent of on-reserve Indian housing was considered to be in satisfactory condition. Of the general population 90 per cent of Canadians' houses were in good condition. On the other hand, while almost 21 per cent of housing for Indians was so bad that it needed to be replaced, only 8 per cent of the general population lived in houses which were in extremely poor condition.

I have said many times and in many different places—and I will continue to do so and press for this until I see some results—that there should be a log housing program for the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Smith (Churchill): Hear, hear!

Mr. Firth: I am glad to hear some support coming from that corner over there. Such a program could be started in the western Arctic. Such a program would be very important to the people of the Mackenzie Valley at this time. It would be important to many other areas of Canada as well, I am sure. This program could be truly a joint socio-economic solution to a severe problem. People would end up with good houses which would last a long time. Local labour could be used for this construction rather than having southern manufacturing firms send up pre-fabricated homes which would not stand up to the harsh environment up there. Furthermore, an indigenous renewable natural resource could be used.

To further economic development in the north a program should be initiated whereby people who live in the north could return to the business of harvesting natural renewable resources. A good trapper's assistance program would cost a lot of money, but it would also save a lot of people from the social ills that many in the north suffer.

Many in the north are trying to live in what may be termed the new style. Some become caught in a pay cheque to pay cheque existence, and sometimes it is a no pay cheque to no pay cheque existence for a long time. A self-employed trapper might not see a pay cheque for a few years, but he would be willing to make a living at trapping if he had good equipment, good transportation—whether it be by motorized toboggan or by dogteam—good water transportation equipment and good camping equipment to go out on to the land. If he had all these things, he would be able to take a lot of food supplies from the land by means of harvesting caribou, moose, fish and so on.

After a brief visit to the north one of the ministers across the way mentioned just a few days ago that he found the cost of living up there to be very high. We have to look at northern problems in northern terms and find northern solutions for them. To achieve this, control over economic development must be given to northern people.

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My colleagues and I have also spoken out on the AIB, claiming that it does not work. This fact can be no more clearly illustrated than in the north. While the AIB's own figures confirm that nowhere in Canada is it more expensive to