

Indian Affairs

was not very novel, but that it was what had been advocated by Indians for years. We do not intend to rush, the Indian lands question is one which we have contemplated from the outset and would take a number of years to work out in consultation with the Indian people.

I urge the house and all Canadians, Indians and non-Indians, to look again at the language in the foreword of the policy statement in which we concluded, and I will repeat it:

The government commends this policy for the consideration of all Canadians.

It is our sincere hope that everyone will take time to read the policy statement carefully. We will be involved in extensive consultations with the Indian people in the years ahead. We want to offer the Indian people a very real opportunity to participate in shaping their future.

• (5:20 p.m.)

Finally, it is quite clear that the more generalized concerns about Indian rights and treaties are clouding consideration of the specifics of the government's proposed policy. We believe that the specifics of our proposed policy have to be considered for their value to Indian life today and in the future. It is important that the future not be sacrificed by undue concentration on the past. However, we have not neglected the past. We understand and appreciate the feeling of the Indian people with regard to possible past injustices in regard to treaties and, as indicated in the statement, we propose to appoint a commissioner who, in the quality of his person, will satisfy everyone as to his objectivity to meet with Indian representatives and any others. He will consider these matters very carefully and make his recommendations to the government as to what action the government might take in this regard.

I would, therefore, urge the Indian people to make use of this means of putting forward their views and feelings with respect to their treaty rights so that a greater understanding may be had by the government and by all Canadians, but not to let this interfere with getting on with providing a better way of life for Indians today and in the future. This is a very serious and important problem that the country faces and I hope that no one in this house or in the country will take a narrow or partisan approach to it. Hon. members have spoken about consultation, and have said we should have more consultation about the implementation of this policy. I agree, and I

[Mr. Chrétien.]

point out that this is mentioned in the policy statement that I made. It is clear that we want to consult.

I have been visiting some of the provinces. I want to meet representatives of the provincial governments at this stage, not to negotiate but to give them information and to reply to the questions that they wish to raise. I may say they have many questions that they want to ask. I have met with some representatives of the Indians and have listened to them. They have put many specific questions to me and I have tried to reply. I am planning to visit all of the provinces within the next few weeks for information purposes.

We are not rushing anything or anyone. We want to reassure the Indians on the land question. It was alleged that we wanted to see the Indians sell their land for two bottles of wine, or something like that. This is not so, Mr. Speaker. We want to give them what every other Canadian has in this country, namely, the right to make decisions for themselves.

At present Indians have to seek permission from the Minister of Indian Affairs if they wish to lease their lands. I do not think they should be obliged to do so. I feel very strongly about this matter. The procedure they must follow is through the district agency and on to the department in Ottawa, to my desk, and then back again from there. Sometimes this procedure takes weeks and weeks, even months and months for minor decisions to be made. I do not think it is right, and I want to change it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Chrétien: I know that the members of this house agree with me on that.

Some hon. Members: Hear hear.

Mr. Chrétien: These Indian people are human beings and I want to get rid of our paternalistic approach to them. It is said that they are afraid we want to dump them. This is not so, Mr. Speaker. We do not want to dump any of the programs that we have for Indians. But we do want Indian children to receive the same education as their neighbours.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) said there could be no equality of services when separate services were provided to white people and to Indian people. That is right. We want to give the Indians the same kind of services that the other citizens of Canada have. I repeat that we do not want