

Government Orders

It is an agreement that shows the desire by the Inuit people to achieve self-determination. It is a measure and a law that will at least give some control or will re-establish, to use the actual words of the member for Nunatsiak, some control by the Inuit people over their own affairs. It is therefore a very enlightened initiative.

Therefore there is nothing wrong in complimenting the minister and the government for having taken this step. We all see this as a very positive initiative.

By way of background, it is important to also see the geographic magnitude. The Nunavut will cover an area that is one-fifth of that of Canada, some two million square kilometres. It has a population of some 22,000 people, of which 17,500 or so are Inuit. It has a mean temperature in January of minus 35 Celsius and a mean temperature in July of plus 10 Celsius. It has a population per square kilometre of one, compared to a population of 20 to 25 per square kilometre in the rest of Canada.

It is blessed by one great thing for someone like me who comes from Toronto. It has only 20 kilometres of highway. Imagine that. This is a sign of high civilization. These are people who know how to move around without polluting their environment.

One of the things that strikes the visitor is to find out that one litre of milk can cost up to \$4, one loaf of bread can cost anywhere from \$2.50 to \$3, and a kilo of potatoes can cost as much as \$2 to \$3.

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The cost of living in the Arctic and in the Nunavut territory is extremely high. That fact emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the natural resources of Nunavut are conserved, protected and made available to the present and expanded future population so that the Inuit people can continue to draw from the land the nourishment they need without having to depend more and more on imported food.

The member for Nunatsiak also made a very interesting reference to the land, the waters and the wildlife and the fact that the Inuit people are not separate from their environment. They are part of it and they consider the environment to be part of their culture. This is a very

impressive way of defining their life and it is an attitude from which we non-Inuit could learn.

The member for Nunatsiak went on to say that the land claim negotiations are seen by non-aboriginal people as a real estate transaction and this is not the view of the Inuit people because for them it is difficult to understand the non-aboriginal concept of individual land title and ownership.

They have a far better concept than the one we have. I do not believe that land belongs to anyone. We can rent the land while we are on this earth and we can use it, but basically the land belongs to the environment. If we were to borrow this concept from the Inuit people I think we would treat the land with much greater respect and we would have many fewer problems in the environment than we are facing now, particularly with regard to the disposal of waste.

I think it is a far superior concept to see this transaction not as an individual land title and ownership transaction but as a way of ensuring that there is a relationship with the land from which people draw their livelihood. This is highly commendable and a concept from which we could learn a lot.

The member for Nunatsiak also stressed the importance for Canadians to understand that there is a tremendous power imbalance that exists in these negotiations between the aboriginal people on the one hand and the federal government on the other. The federal government makes the rules, it can change the rules and it can even break the rules. It has the money, all the expertise and armies of bureaucrats at its disposal. He put it very well. That is the history. The aboriginal negotiators, on the other hand, do not have access to all of these resources.

The motive and intention is to ensure a better future for present and future generations of children. We understand and respect this long-term concept. In looking at the agreement I am glad to see that it has a strong article 5 on wildlife and that it has a fairly strong concept of conservation. In future this concept could possibly be strengthened, particularly article 5.1.5(a) which says that one of the principles of conservation is:

the maintenance of the natural balance of ecological systems within the Nunavut Settlement Area.