

should be involved in discussions with the provinces.

It says that federal departments will do this concurrently with those provinces which agree.

It says that the Indian people should control their own land.

It says that those bands which want title to their land should be able to take it.

It says that if the provinces extend their services, and other federal departments extend theirs to Indians, the Department of Indian Affairs would be phased out of operation. After all, Indian Affairs has been attacked by everybody. Who could complain if the Government believed that the critics had meant what they said?

The statement says that it hopes this could be done in five years. It goes on to say that the matter of Indian control of Indian land will take longer. Among the numbers of years which are greater than five, there is a wide range of choices. But everyone has fixed on five years, which is impossible. There are 550 bands. There are over 2,000 reserves. An Indian Lands Act is necessary to protect the land. Such an Act will have to be talked about, consulted about, drafted, made into law and put into effect. In five years? Not at all. It was never suggested. We know, and Indian people know, that this will take time.

The statement said that the treaties would be reviewed by the Indians and the Commissioner for Indian Claims to determine the best way of adjudicating claims arising from them.

The statement said that the Government recognized that all Canadians should acknowledge the virtues, strengths and richness of Indian culture and languages.

The statement said that the Government would develop, with the Indian people, programs to enrich their cultural heritage and their sense of identity.

Are these proposals to be taken as an abrogation of treaties? Are they cultural genocide? I do not see how anyone can suggest that they are.

As soon as the policy proposal was out, there were headlines about "turning the Indians over to the provinces".

Shortly after the headlines, there were editorials about the problems involved in doing that which was never suggested should be done.

At the same time some Indian leaders began telling the Government it ought not to do that which many of them had sought for years.

SENSIBLE DISCUSSION NEEDED

What is needed now is a sensible and meaningful discussion about the step to be taken and to separate the principal components of the problem so they can be dealt with appropriately.

We want to talk. We want to have a dialogue with Indian spokesmen and we want the provinces to join in the talks.

I can well appreciate the reaction of Indian people towards the policy proposals. The proposals

represent a dramatic break from the past. Spokesmen for the Indian people have asked for time to consider the proposals and to draft alternative proposals of their own. This is a reasonable position to take.

Indian people, because of past experiences, have a deep distrust of governments, both federal and provincial, and tend to regard the proposals with suspicion. In private meetings with representatives of the Indian people, I have explained the policy proposals and I have listened to their comments and criticisms. These meetings have been helpful, and many more will be held.

There is room for disagreement about what is to be done. There is room for a great deal of discussion before anything is done. There is no room for rejecting out of hand that which was never proposed at all.

Last year a series of meetings with spokesmen for each band of Indian people were held. It soon became apparent that the Indian Act, as such, was not the first priority of many Indian people. It also soon became apparent that the restrictions imposed by the present Act had outlived their usefulness. It was clear that the Government could not sit back. It had to respond to what Indian people had been saying.

It was clear to the Government that many Indians were preoccupied by considerations of their treaties and rights. It was equally clear that this is a complex matter which cannot be resolved quickly.

The Government does not believe that the whole matter of the Indian people's well-being should be set aside pending resolution of treaty problems and claims. It is the Government's view that the various elements of the problem should be separated. Treaties include land entitlement. This major factor is dealt with as one which must be worked out on a band-by-band basis over an extended period of time.

CONTROL AND PROTECTION OF LAND

The Government recognizes that many Indians want to see some safeguards which will ensure that their land is not alienated from Indian occupancy, remains with the band and will not be open for land speculators to grab from them. The Government hopes that an Indian Lands Act can be evolved to provide Indian people with both control of their own land and the degree of protection for it which they feel is appropriate. The legislation will have to be flexible so that the degree of control and protection can be worked out and applied band by band.

Indian land will stay Indian land. It will not be up for grabs by speculators. This does not mean that the present federal trusteeship for Indian land — which is both bureaucratic and paternalistic — should remain. This does not mean that the Minister of Indian Affairs has to make every decision about every summer cottage site leased on Indian land.

It does not mean that Indian people should have to turn to Ottawa every time they want to act.

I should like to see a vigorous debate about what