

Government Orders

The agreement on the BCTC requires the principals to establish the BCTC through legislative means. The federal and provincial governments agreed to adopt legislation to achieve this goal, while the summit agreed to pass a resolution to that effect.

To enable the BCTC to start operating as soon as possible, commissioners were appointed on an acting basis by provincial and federal orders in council dated April 13, 1995 and April 14, 1993 respectively and by a summit resolution dated April 5. These orders in council gave the commissioners the authority to carry out the agreed mandate pending the adoption of legislation to establish the BCTC as a separate corporate entity. This is of course the beginning of the process we are involved in.

On April 15, 1993, chief commissioner C.J. Connaghan and commissioners Lorne Greenaway, Barbara Risher, Carole Corcoran and Doug Kelly were appointed to the BCTC.

On May 11, 1993, the Summit passed a resolution to fulfil its role and support the establishment of this entity. On May 26 of the same year, the provincial bill was assented to pending the implementation of a federal statute. Political parties support the BCTC legislation.

The hon. Tom Siddon, acting on behalf of the federal government, and the province of British Columbia managed to complete their negotiations on cost sharing by June 1993.

In December, the BCTC started accepting statements of intention to negotiate from First Nations in British Columbia.

You can see the series of events that finally led to us debating this bill in the House today.

In April 1995, Alec Robertson was appointed chief commissioner and Peter Lusztig and Wilf Adam commissioners, while Carole Corcoran and Barbara Risher were re-appointed. Adjustments were made to expiring mandates. Some commissioners were re-appointed and, in other cases, new ones were appointed. On October 5, 1995, the Summit accepted Ms. Corcoran's resignation and designated Miles Richardson to replace her as the First Nations' representative.

• (1710)

I would now like to take a moment to look at the duties of this commission we are in the process of officially establishing. The duties of the commission are as follows: to assess the readiness of the parties to begin negotiations, the parties being of course Canada, British Columbia and the first nations; to finance the participation of first nations in the negotiations, in accordance with pre-established criteria; to encourage timely negotiations; to maintain a public record of the status of negotiations; to assist, at their request, the parties to the negotiations in obtaining dispute resolution services; and to report on the status of

negotiations to the Parliament of Canada and to the British Columbia legislature.

In the few minutes that I have left, I want to discuss the status of negotiations. Forty-seven groups are engaged in the BCTC process. These groups represent 77 per cent of the 196 first nations in British Columbia. For those who are not from that province, it always comes as a surprise to hear that there are 196 first nations in British Columbia. In my riding, which you know well, I have the honour of representing the Akwesasne first nation, which is a Mohawk nation.

This is not the time to talk about some of the problems which exist in that region of the country. However, I hope that, at some point, during a parliamentary debate, I can express my wish that the problems which we have been experiencing in the Akwesasne region can end, so that all can live in peace and harmony, and enjoy a degree of prosperity, while complying with the laws passed by this Parliament.

I now go back to the progress made regarding the legislation before this House. The parties have indicated their readiness to negotiate. The negotiators signed framework agreements concerning, for example, the Teslin, Ditidaht and Gitanyow nations. The federal Minister of Indian Affairs, the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie, signed framework agreements concerning the Sechelt and Gitksan first nations. He also signed other agreements concerning the transborder land claim made by the Champagne, Aishihik and Wet'suwet'en first nations. I apologize to aboriginal members for not pronouncing these names properly, but it is not out of disrespect.

I hope that the House will quickly pass this bill, which is so important for these negotiations. I also hope that all members of this House will support this bill. Mr. Speaker, as you may remember, there was a rather sad episode in this House about a year ago when we discussed the issue of land negotiations in the Yukon. A parliamentary committee even had to sit throughout the night in an attempt to have a bill approved in committee.

• (1715)

Indeed, the committee sat all night, until six or seven in the morning.

Needless to say that I hope we do not have to suffer such delays, and that we will proceed as quickly as possible to pass the bill currently before the House.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.