

Supply

taking another step towards the completion of that journey of a thousand miles.

I do not want to go on very much longer. I have mentioned the disgraceful treatment of Indian people over generations. I mentioned the economic situation of Indian people across this country, including my province and my riding. In addition to enshrining self-government for Indian people, we must make sure that we give them the tools with which to do the work, in other words, money for economic development. When they have that, I hope we devise a system where decisions can be made by Indian people themselves so they have local control over projects in their communities and on their reserves. That is very important.

I remember an experience in my own riding on the Coté Indian reserve. When I was first elected in 1968, over 90 per cent of the people there were unemployed and on welfare. The crime rate was one of the highest in Saskatchewan. There was a very high rate of violent crime, drug abuse and alcoholism. After a few years, probably about 1970 or 1971, a newer and younger chief was elected. His name was Tony Coté. He believed, with some of the newer councillors on that reserve, that there should be more self-government and more of an effort of Indian people to look after their own lives and destiny. He campaigned to that effect. After a while that reserve became one of two in the province to get the chance to administer its own welfare. It made its own decisions. After a while it had an Indian policeman. It started to drive its own school buses, opened up its own laundromat, grocery stores and service station. It ran these places itself and put a few people to work.

I worked on many of these projects with them. I remember one project in particular. It was called the Coté fence post project. They would manufacture fence posts. Saskatchewan has a lot of ranches and farms in need of fence posts. Nothing was more logical than having such a project on this reserve near Kamsack, which is near the forest area of Saskatchewan. The province is not all flat; it has forests as well. They sent many of their men into the forests, cut the trees, brought them back, cut them into fence posts, treated them, stored them and sold them. That provided jobs for Indian people on that reserve. I also remember being involved in helping them set up a band farm. I remember Albert Coté, one of the elders on the reserve, who ran that farm. He gave leadership in having Indians run the farm themselves rather than renting the land out to white farmers. That provided more jobs for Indian people. I remember the arenas and community centres which were built so that young people had a place to go for recreational activities on the reserve rather than going five or six miles to the Town of Kamsack and hanging around poolrooms, getting beer from the pub and getting drunk in a back alley or somewhere else.

Those were positive contributions made at that time by a council and chief who wanted to take their destiny into their own hands. I think they were able to do that in this case without a great deal of help from white society, the Government of Canada, or the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Of course the officials in that Department in most cases co-operated as much as they could within the parameters and restrictions they faced.

I believe we can do a lot of things if we trust people to look after themselves and make the decisions affecting their own lives. I know that they, like us, will make mistakes. Look at the mistakes made by white politicians and white Governments of all three political Parties across this country. There is not a single political Party which has not made mistakes, suffered scandals, or had embarrassing things happen to them. Of course Indian people will make mistakes. You only learn by doing something for yourself.

I do not think there are any greater experts in this country than those living in a community with the right to make the decisions affecting that community itself. It is the worker in a plant who knows how to run the plant and make a product. It is an Indian on a reserve who knows what to do on the reserve. It is the farmer on the land who knows how to farm the land. This country must move more and more towards decentralization of the economy. Local people must have control over the local economy and the kind of jobs they want to produce. That is the direction in which we have to go. If we do this, I really believe we will have a much better society.

In conclusion I want to say that it is very important that we respect the treaty signed between the Indian nations and the Queen's representative many years ago. I remember in my riding once again, on the Keeseekoose Indian reserve, talking to a former chief. He told me a short time before he died how important it was for white politicians never to forget the treaties we signed with the Indian nations many years ago. We must never forget how important they are to Indian people and their future.

I see you are about to rise, Madam Speaker. I just want to say one more thing. This has been a good debate. I hope this positive attitude will be carried into the constitutional conference next week. We should remember, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) should remember, and the Premiers should remember, that in the long run a society and country is judged on how it treats minorities. In the final analysis, when history is written, there can be no better way of judging Canada than by how we treat our aboriginal people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): It being 5 p.m., it is my duty to inform the House that pursuant to Standing Order 82(12) the proceedings on the motion have now expired.