

Indian Act

and therefore could not hunt, they are being discriminated against.

It turned out that after a lot of discussions and a lot of talking back and forth and a few harsh words here and there, the situation was resolved to the point where the Inuit ladies ended up being allowed to hunt polar bear. Now, people did not raise eyebrows when those ladies went out hunting and perhaps their husbands, who may be non-Inuit, pulled the trigger, but at least for the sake of peace the issue was resolved. I think there is an opportunity nowadays to rectify a lot of things and avoid a lot of problems that are inherent in the Indian Act, especially Section 12(1)(b).

I understand that the amendments are going to remove the discrimination against Indian women and would also give the Indian bands the ability to determine who would be eligible, and I think that would satisfy both sides. It would not necessarily be to everyone's satisfaction, but in relation to what is happening in the Northwest Territories, at least they have something which they could sink their teeth into.

I would now like to discuss briefly what I heard many Members making reference to, and that is colonial governments and the need to avoid the same situation. There is in fact this opportunity in the Northwest Territories. For example, many of you may have read certain items in the newspapers since the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Crombie) announced that the Government would agree to the creation of two territories out of the existing territory if the boundaries could be resolved by the northerners themselves. The discussions about self government and the division of the Northwest Territories has been going on for the last eight years. However, charges of discrimination against non-Inuit, or specifically charges that northerners wish to create ethnic governments, have been advanced by people who generally oppose the majority of the Inuit population. In the proposed Eastern Arctic territory people of Inuit origin, such as myself, would be in the majority by about 80 per cent.

● (1500)

I would like to raise a question here. One of the obstacles to the agreement by the federal Government to allow northerners to create two territories was that the Inuit were trying to create an ethnic government. In fact, we are willing to be assimilated. We are willing to take a colonial style territorial government such as now exists in our area, and mould it into our own. We will accept that. Earlier this week in one of the Canadian Press reports there was a reference once again to ethnicity. In earlier reports it was mentioned that the Inuit and Indians used to fight a long time ago. Mr. Speaker, we do not need to go through all these stories which do not apply any more. We are now in a modern situation. An opportunity exists in the Northwest Territories with another aboriginal group to exercise the modern ways of right and wrong.

I wanted to explain from the perspective of a native person that it is very encouraging to hear parliamentarians talking about the need to allow native people to make a contribution to the systems of government in Canada. I believe that we do have a lot of things to contribute to the Canadian system if we

could only avoid the pitfalls which have dogged many of the discussions relating to aboriginal rights, such as the constitutional discussions, the land claims discussions and other discussions relating either to Indian or to native self-government. I would like to encourage Members here, especially the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, to keep the dialogue going, because there are answers to the problems.

I would like to conclude my remarks by saying that I have had representations from Indian bands both for and against changes to Clause 12(1)(b). I have heard and can identify with many of the remarks made about problems that may develop as a result of these changes. I have also heard representations from women who are very concerned about the discriminatory clauses of the Indian Act. I think that the amendments which are now being proposed could satisfy both sides of the camp. We should accept the changes as they are being proposed, knowing that there will be other opportunities in the future to discuss these in a very gentlemanly fashion if we discover more things that do not work out.

Mr. John Parry (Kenora-Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, I rise address Bill C-31 with as full a sense of responsibility for our work and deliberations in the House of Commons as I have had heretofore, and certainly with as full a sense of that responsibility as I ever hope to have. As the Hon. Minister for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) observed, this is indeed a historic occasion in the life of this House. We are working today, and will be working in committee and at third reading, to attempt to correct a historic sequence of injustices, the perpetration of which began many years ago and has multiplied over the intervening centuries and decades.

We are here, unfortunately, to make decisions which determine the very fabric of the lives of a people and of nations which are not represented directly in this Chamber. I say that with no disrespect to the Hon. Member for Nunatsiak (Mr. Suluk) whom we just heard, but knowing that the Indian Act does specifically exclude the Inuit people and knowing that there are no Members of this present Parliament who claim Indian status. That places a great degree of responsibility on us because the decisions that we take, at least at the level of the House, will be without the benefit of the direct representation of Indian people. We will be determining their lives. We must remember that when we talk of Indian people we use a convenient, crisp, inaccurate term that comprises a people whose diversity and variety of cultures and heritages fully matches, if not actually surpasses, those of the heritages and cultures that we as Canadians of largely European Caucasian origin represent.

It is a pity in a way, and I doubt that I will ever feel it to be more of a disadvantage, that our rules do not allow us to hear from substitutes, but only from Members of Parliament within this Chamber. I know from my experience with native leaders in my riding that there are many men and women who could far better express the feelings of native people, be it in their language or in English, on the legislation that is before us. In my capacity as Member for Kenora-Rainy River, I have the privilege of representing more bands than any other Member