

*Government Orders*

later negotiated it back so that they somehow would justify their occupation of this country.

If one looks at the Indian philosophy, our way of thinking, governments did not need to do that because our way of thinking is to share what we have, including the land and resources that we signed in our treaties, including in the Northwest Territories and today in the Yukon settlement.

We have been very patient, very generous, very kind and we have never rejected anyone who came to this country. As a matter of fact, we extended our hand to the rest of the world for the kind of country this can be, this great country that we call Canada today.

Sometimes I cannot fathom the thinking of the Reform Party in which it questions the land that is being claimed and settled with the aboriginal people. Our people never questioned their generosity to the rest of the people. We never questioned that because that is our way to extend a hand, to share what we have. That is our greatest strength as First Nations people.

What is happening today, what we are trying to retain are parts of the country, parts of our territory, so that we can continue to live traditionally and with the rest of society. If one looks at the relationship from day one and if one looks at the European people who came into this country, they were out to look for treasures, to conquer the world, to seek the riches of the world.

They came to this land and found the First Nations people who were very kind and generous here. They never knew the concept of land tenure, to own the land. The concept is as foreign as owning the air. That is how foreign that concept was to our elders at the time when we signed the treaties.

Treaties are about establishing relationships so that we would live with each other, so that we would live side by side with each other, so that we would honour each other, so that we would respect each other and not to dominate each other such as the case has been over the past hundreds of years.

• (1930)

Many of the people who were signing treaties went back and started implementing a policy of the government which totally dominates us today as First Nations people. They passed an Indian Act which has been in place for a hundred years. It affects us on a daily basis as to whom we are today. It defines us as Indians. It even contributes to the conflict and chaos in our communities.

With the new Bill C-31 we have many categories of Indian people. We have status people. We have non-status people. We have treaty Indians. We have Bill C-31 Indians. We have band Indians. Governments have tried to define us, but we have always said that we are First Nations. The definition of member-

ship should belong to the First Nations government. It should define who are its members.

People often wonder why we are not improving our lives in the communities or the conditions we live in. We still have poor housing conditions. We have no running water. We have no electricity. Infrastructure is terrible. If we look at the statistics in terms of illnesses and hospital use by First Nations people, they are high. The suicide rate would be four times as high, four times the national average. Our children drop out of high school at an early age. Oftentimes they are symptoms of the social conditions we live in, symptoms of the lack of control in our communities.

We are not asking the government to give us something. We are asking the government to share what we have, to respect our governments, to respect our ability to control our lives and to respect that we are able to determine our own future. This is not about living in a different world because Canada belongs to everybody. To the aboriginal people it is not about separating. There is no threat of separation in the country.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Harper (Churchill):** We are not asking for land. Unlike the Bloc our intention is not to separate. Our intention is to keep the country together, to live with each other.

I just want to get back to the original terms of our relationship. It is important to understand why we live in the conditions on our reserves. The first and most destructive piece of legislation that has kept us under wraps has been the Indian Act. I have always thought the Indian Act would have established the relationship between the governments of Canada and the First Nations, not one that totally binds us or totally shackles us on a daily basis. By trying to do away with the Indian Act the government can address the issue. At least it will put the control of our lives and our destinies in the hands of the First Nations. We have never signed away or bargained away that right.

Governments outlawed many of our ceremonies. They basically outlawed our Indian spirituality. Indian spirituality is a way of life for us. Governments outlawed the dances, the ceremonies and the potlatch. Basically they outlawed how we manifested our relationship with the Creator. It was against the law to do that.

• (1935)

Indian spirituality is a way of life. In order to establish a relationship with oneself, with one's family and with the community one needs to have that spirituality in oneself to establish that relationship, to be able to establish the relationship with other people who have come to this country of Canada, even to establish the relationship with the environment, with all living things, with the land, the air, the water, all the trees and all the