

Mr. Allmand: I will not even take issue with the arguments put forward by the NDP to support its motion. I will, however, put forward the government's position on some of the questions involved and where we presently stand on land claims.

Mr. Justice Berger in volume I of his report has given us a timely, thoughtful, and eloquent commentary on a very complex situation existing in the Mackenzie Valley at present. It is a report of very direct significance for me as the Minister responsible for Indian Affairs and Northern Development. It reflects in a coherent way many of my current pre-occupations and appreciations relating to native land claims, economic development and political evolution in the Northwest Territories. It was clear from the proceedings of the Berger inquiry, whether in the representative public meetings held in the large centres or in the less formal small gatherings in the tiny communities, that the Berger Commission was receiving evidence on a whole range of concerns. These concerns were triggered by the pipeline applications but extended well beyond them in terms of both content and implication.

Many of the same concerns have been raised in other forums and at earlier times. Some are less well known than others. Some are susceptible of effective government response, others raise real difficulties that are not easily overcome.

Judge Berger was asked to make recommendations in relation to the pipeline applications. In the course of his inquiry he has heard references to a whole range of problems that have been raised by various people in the Mackenzie Valley. Accordingly, his report does make certain recommendations that will be considered by the government in the months to come, along with other advice and recommendations on the same subject.

He also makes comments on other issues and problems that are valuable, and especially to me as the minister concerned with Indian and Inuit affairs, because they bear directly on key aspects of the government's continuing responsibilities for and relationships with these native groups.

In the first place there is much that I can agree with in the commission's assessment of the needs and aspirations of the northern native peoples. I am aware of their concerns—many of them shared by Indians generally in this country—about the threats to Indian and Inuit identity that are inherent in the rapid economic and social development all around them.

Since assuming my responsibilities as minister I have had frequent occasion to assure representatives of the Indian people, both in public and private meetings, that the government is committed to continuing its special responsibilities in relation to them; to safeguarding their Indian status, rights and interests; to ensuring their continuing Indian identity within Canadian society. This commitment is expressed and reflected in a whole range of policies and activities the government is pursuing at the present time north and south of the 60th parallel.

This can best be illustrated by the following quotations from current policies of the government: first, from a statement

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entitled "Canada's north 1970-1980" made in March, 1972, which reads as follows:

The people of the north have survived for many centuries in spite of the harsh conditions prevailing there. In recent decades the native northerners have been offered new opportunities and facilities for strengthening their capacity to survive. But survival for them must be more than mere subsistence supplemented by government subsidy. It must above all permit the people themselves to make their own choices as to the place they wish to occupy and the part they wish to play, in the evolving society of Canada, north and south of the 60th parallel.

Second, the statement on claims of Indian and Inuit people, released on August 8, 1973, which reads as follows:

The government has been fully aware that the claims are not only for money and land, but involve the loss of a way of life. Any settlement, therefore, must contribute positively to a lasting solution of cultural, social and economic problems that for too long have kept the Indian and Inuit people in a disadvantaged position within the larger Canadian society.

Third, a directive to all directors general of the Indian affairs program issued by the minister on July 26, 1976, enclosing a paper entitled, "Approach to Government-Indian Relationship", which reads as follows:

The emphasis of the approach is on processes of joint participation in policy/program developments with organized Indian leadership at all levels. In conveying to you this paper, I intend that you should be guided at all times by this approach, the various implications of which are summarized in the paper. The approach would also serve as a broad policy framework for all federal departments and agencies having programs that affect status Indians, with heavy emphasis on systematic consultation among departments concerned both in Ottawa and in the field.

These policies are reflected in the processes established and contemplated under the National Indian Brotherhood-Cabinet Committee, in the claims negotiations, in the progressive transfer of authority and resources to Indian bands, and Indian people.

Judge Berger has also commented about the need for a partnership of interests between government and the native peoples. This is something else that I subscribe to whole-heartedly and that has become a principal thrust of departmental effort, during the past year or so, toward an improved relationship with the Indian people.

In a wide subject area including housing, education, economic development, and Indian Act revision, departmental officials and I have been engaged in closely-knit, joint working arrangements intended and designed to arrive at agreed accommodations of policy and program, whereby the Indian people can take charge of their own affairs in ways of their own choosing.

I agree with Judge Berger that the Indian and Inuit groups in the north must have freedom and latitude, in making their own choices about how they wish to run their own affairs. It is basic to the government's current Indian and northern policy that self-government, education, municipal services and economic development in native communities should reflect native values and take into account suggestions advanced by communities themselves. This is a key consideration in the negotiation of comprehensive land claims and in the proposed political consultation that I will be mentioning later.

The Berger report refers frequently, though not precisely, to native institutions, including their own political institutions.