

had been made by Mr. Coolican on the subject of a comprehensive land claims settlement. They were hailing it particularly because the report contained a reference to the fact that there would be no extinguishment of native rights in arriving at these settlements. Native people across Canada were pressing the Government to adopt this and, as I recall, the Hon. Member was pressing the Government to adopt it as well. In fact, that is just what the Minister did. As a result of that action taken by the Minister, the Hon. Member was delighted and thrilled. He felt that this would be a motivating force that would help move the process along. I wonder if the Hon. Member could confirm for us that he was pressing the Government to adopt the Coolican report and that he is enthusiastic about it and very grateful to the Government and the Minister for adopting that particular report which does motivate the process of native self-government.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member may have been present in the House the day I responded to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. McKnight) on the new comprehensive claims policy. This new policy includes the possibility for negotiating self-government. Like all policies, however, it must get off paper and become a motivating force. That is what we are now waiting to see.

I would ask the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, who is present and will probably speak, how soon it will be before the Council for Yukon Indians receives its mandate to negotiate its claim. It is still anxiously waiting and its members have been visiting Parliament Hill, making representations to Ministers and calling on officials. If the new policy results in the settlement of comprehensive claims before the mandate of the Government expires, I would be the first to rejoice.

A policy is one thing. I have seen many fine reports produced by Members of Parliament on a wide range of subjects. I have heard many Ministers of different administrations express that which they had hoped to achieve. In the final analysis, however, judgment is based on what actually takes place. We are still waiting for something to happen. The Minister is due to appear before the standing committee shortly and we will be anxious to know what definite concrete steps have been taken based on the new policy he announced. I would not use all the adjectives used by the Hon. Member, but I certainly recognized that it was an advance over what we previously had.

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I would like to say a few words about the motion put forward by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Kenora—Rainy River (Mr. Parry). When I first read the motion, I wondered what tone the debate would take. I very much appreciate the tone on which the debate started and I think it will continue on the same tone.

There is one thing that those on all three sides of the House—if I could call it a three-sided House—must recognize,

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and that is that everyone involved in this issue wants to make a contribution and is involved for reasons that do not usually translate into large electoral victories or change the face of a constituency overnight. Everyone involved in native, aboriginal, and Indian issues is involved for several different reasons. While the reasons I just mentioned are not dishonourable, I would suggest that the others are more honourable.

We do recognize the shortcomings in the ways previous Governments of Canada have dealt with aboriginal people. We also recognize that while Governments were perhaps not the motivators for change and were not putting forward policies that provided for change at a rapid pace, and while we have been talking about, worrying about, and discussing self-government, the aboriginal people have been moving forward and making changes. They have been the initiators of the improvements we see today.

The Sechelt and Cree-Naskapi agreements for aboriginal Governments which control the daily lives, the economic development and the very existence of aboriginal people would not have been envisaged 35 years ago when the Indian Act was reviewed for the last time. Parliamentarians of the day would not have been able to envisage this ever happening to aboriginal people in Canada, yet it did happen and the reason it did happen was the leadership shown by aboriginal people.

When we look at national and community-level leadership of Indian communities today, we see a vital and evolving leadership, one that is shaping the way this Government will deal with Indian and Inuit peoples across Canada. Indeed, it is shaping the way we will go together into the 21st century. Over the years, dramatic changes have been made. Again, I do not attribute all of those changes to actions of the Government of Canada either now or in the past.

As we look around and see that there is the acquiring of skills and of technical abilities and the acquiring of educational and professional skills that will be needed to build the aboriginal communities of the future, we should have some hope and feel confident as Canadians that there is a future. Aboriginal leaders have an enormous task in keeping the values of the past which have been passed down by elders while at the same time creating a vision of the future that can fit into the 21st century. Native Canadians are already acquiring greater control over their lives and over an opportunity for a strong future.

This Government is giving or returning control over their own affairs to aboriginal people. It is not doing so, as my friend, the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior (Mr. Penner), suggested, at a pace which would startle anyone or cause one to see dramatic change, but we are returning something which should have been in existence on an ongoing basis. If the keys to the future of the aboriginal people in Canada are self-government and economic development, then the changes are being made by the aboriginal peoples themselves. Self-government has become a priority. Why? Because the Indian people have made it a priority.