

The verbal presentation made to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development on Bill C-9* by Northern Quebec Inuit Association President, Charlie W. Watt, in Ottawa, February 3, 1977.

The original presentation was made in Inuktitut. This is a translation as it was made at the hearing.

(due to time limitations, we are only able to supply a rough and uncorrected draft of his speech.)

* Bill C-9 is the Federal Government's legislation that will bring the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement into force.

First of all, before getting into the brief and the presentation, I would like to give a brief history of what led - the events leading up to the agreement itself.

First of all, it should be stated that the Hudson Bay Company was the first outside group of any kind that made any extensive contact with the Inuit people.

The Company, the Hudson Bay Company went north for the fur trade as a major activity in their contact with the Inuit people and during this initial contact they did business with the Inuit people in all sorts of furs and at times they charged themselves with the welfare of the Inuit people, because they were the primary contact with the outside world.

When things were not going well, as they did not very often times in those days, and when the fur trade and such activity was not going well, the Hudson Bay Company dispensed assistance to widows and people in need which, primarily, was the government's responsibility, but government was not around at that time. So the company took it upon themselves to assist the Inuit people wherever possible in material ways.

As an example of the Hudson Bay Company's assistance in those days, Inuit who were in need were given per family, per week, the following provisions: 8 pounds of flour; half-a-pound of tea; half-a-pound of lard; half-a-pound of baking powder; 2 pounds of molasses or 2 pounds of sugar. These were the provisions that were given to one family for one week, regardless of the fact that the family before the government took over responsibility for Inuit's welfare.

The assistance given by the company to the Inuit people in the North was wide-spread. It did not take place in one concentrated area and the company spent tremendous amounts of its resources and supplies to assist the Inuit in this way.

When the Hudson Bay Company claimed their money from the government, from the provincial government for giving welfare to the Inuit this was refused. The provincial government refused to pay, refused to have anything to do with what the company dispensed to the Inuit people.

The question of responsibility of who was in charge of the Inuit's welfare and their well-being was bounced around between the provincial government and the federal government at that time, prompted by the Hudson Bay Company's request for payment for welfare given to the Inuit people. This resulted in a legal battle between the two governments as to who was responsible for the Inuit people. The provincial government even took the federal government to court and this happened in 1936.

The outcome of the legal battle between the two governments define the responsibility for native peoples, particularly the Inuit in this case to be under federal jurisdiction. This was decided in the Canada Supreme Court decision of 1939 which the provincial government won in getting the decision to say that the federal government was responsible for Inuit well-being and welfare. And that decision caused the Inuit to be defined as Indians for the purposes of law, although, for the purposes of dealing with the native people

for the purpose of administration, the Inuit people at that time were defined as Indians.

As a result of these actions, the Inuit were considered as Indians under certain laws of Canada without our knowledge. It is only in very recent times through looking back to the events of those times that the Inuit people have found out the goings on of that period.

There was laws passed in 1898 and in 1912 primarily extending the boundaries of the Province of Quebec to the line that we occupied at that time. These laws were passed and made without any consultation whatsoever with the Inuit people. We had no say in how these laws were formulated. We did not have any knowledge of them until recent times.

When the, which brings us to the period of the nineteen forties, between 1940 and 1950, during the forties the RCMP representing the federal government started appearing in the North and their primary duties were in handling such matters as giving out welfare, handling family allowance and registration and giving these numbers to the Inuit people. This was the first appearance of any government action towards the Inuit.

During the same period between the forties and fifties different companies began exploring the river systems of Northern Quebec. There were various companies who were doing research around some of the major rivers. At that time we were not aware of their intentions. We, at that time, did not know for what purpose these companies and explorers were researching the rivers for.

Then between the fifties and the sixties the federal

government encouraged the gathering of the Inuit people from their various hunting camps to settle in the present settlements. This was through, this was handled through the federal government and during the sixties a majority of the Inuit people started settling in communities.

When the Inuit people first started settling in these communities under the sponsorship of the federal government, the formation of community councils was done through the federal government. The federal government encouraged that these new communities springing up in the North have community councils. When the people who used to live in their various camps gathered to these settlements the community councils were formed. We had asked at that time several times what power and authority these councils will have in their own community. We asked this question to the federal authorities who were sponsoring the formation of community councils. At that time and up to this day we had never had any satisfactory answers as to exactly what kind of power structure and authority would be given to these community councils.

Then during the mid-sixties the provincial government came on the scene and they went North during the mid-sixties to establish themselves and to say that they were the people who have governmental authority over the Inuit.

The person primarily responsible for the thrust of the Quebec government's presence in northern Quebec, René Lévesque, who was the Minister of Natural Resources in the provincial government at that time went north to Fort Chimo to meet representatives of the various councils in the northern Quebec settlements. At that time the initial meetings with

Mr. Lévesque and his officials was the first time that the Inuit heard of belonging to Quebec province which was only in the mid-sixties. Although a law had been passed in 1912, extending the boundaries of the Province of Quebec to the area that we have occupied it was only after Mr. Lévesque's initial approaches to the Inuit people that we found out that we were members of the Province of Quebec.

In amongst the activity of the government's struggling to have authority over the Inuit people, the first time the Inuit made an effort to act as a group was around 1967 with the formation of the Federation of Co-operatives in Northern Quebec. This was a gathering of the various co-operatives that had been formed by that time to have a stronger voice in running their own affairs. It was in the 1967 area that Inuit of Northern Quebec started getting together and acting as a group.

Then, in 1968-69 administrative control of Inuit was proposed by the federal government to be transferred to the provincial government in Northern Quebec. The federal government wanted to hand over responsibility of Inuit administration to the province at that time.

All these activities of the government during the mid and late sixties prompted the Inuit concern for their future to come to a higher level around 1969, 1970, 1971. We became concerned about the actions of the two governments and we started having discussions and we started formulating ideas on how we can join and how we can be included in the government structures and in society in general. We discussed ideas of a regional government that would have authority in Northern Quebec. We discussed that concept of having control

of our land that we occupied. We discussed how our hunting rights could be protected. These concerns were crystalized as a result of the two government bouncing or fighting over administrative control of the Inuit people.

The Inuit People's concern for their future resulted in the formation of an organization that would be charged with looking into the kind of control and authority that we seek over the area that we occupied in Northern Quebec. The Northern Quebec Inuit Association was formed by the Inuit of Northern Quebec to find a means and ways in which our ideas that were discussed during the late sixties and early seventies - the means by which these ideas could become a reality. The Northern Quebec Inuit Association was going to be the vehicle whereby Inuit people were going to deal with these problems and try to find solutions for them.

Now I am going to go briefly over the main reasons and the main problems that prompted the Association to be formed.

First of all there was a lot of duplication of federal and provincial government programmes. Both these governments have various programmes that they wanted to run for the Inuit people. And this was causing a lot of confusion with the Inuit people caught in the middle of the struggle for administrative control over Inuit between these two governments.

The Inuit people were confused in those days when the government officials came to their communities as to which government he was representing. We had to do something about this.

The two governments could not fully understand the needs of the Inuit amongst all this confusion. There was no

means of having Inuit people properly consulted by other governments. The defining of Inuit needs by other governments was never adequate. We had no way to deal on a constructive basis either the federal or provincial government. Therefore whatever programmes and whatever action that the government took in assisting Inuit people were made without proper consultation and therefore were never effective. This to us was not satisfactory and it still is not.

Besides the lack of an effective consultation process between the governments and ourselves, there was at the time also more and more development exploration in the land that we occupied. The development exploration and various activities of this nature never seemed to benefit the people living in the area.

Taking all this into consideration, by 1969 the Inuit people of Northern Quebec were seriously talking about forming a regional government in their area to give us some self-determination to make sure that we had something to do with what happens in our future, and also to try to catch up in what is happening in other parts of Canada, to try to get into the mainstream of Canadian society and the various developments that were going on in the land at that time. We were no longer satisfied with not having anything to do with them. We were not satisfied with the fact that trespassing was going on, with us sitting on the wayside having nothing to do and having no say in how development took place in Northern Quebec. So for all these various reasons we got into negotiations to settle all these problems, to talk to the federal and provincial governments to try to set up structures, to set up mechanisms whereby all these various problems could

be solved in the future.

During the negotiations of the agreement in principle we accepted to have our lands go under provincial jurisdiction. This we did in order to have a more complete control of the land that we were going to own. When we opted for being under provincial jurisdiction the federal government, which we had - the federal government and the provincial government also were shocked and surprised at the decision that we came to go under provincial jurisdiction. This was an example of the kind of nonunderstanding that was prevailing between the federal government and ourselves.

Although the association itself is only five years old, it was formed in April 1971, but it was formally incorporated in June 1972, we feel we have been getting involved tremendously in our future through the activities of the association. The association represented the Inuit's interests in the negotiations between the two governments which led as a result to the agreement that you have before you.

Most of you are probably aware that all of the Inuit people and all of the communities in Northern Quebec are not satisfied with the agreement that has been reached, with the agreement that the association has signed. Even with this we feel we represent the majority of the Inuit people in Northern Quebec and although we feel that all people should act as one group without any divisions, I guess it is just the way of the world that some people cannot be satisfied with what is formulated.

So even with this problem of some of our people going

against the agreement, we still represent the majority and there should be no doubt about this.

The organization that has been formed by members of our people who are not satisfied with the agreement is called ITN. This group has also been constructively informing the Inuit people about the agreement and about how governments work so the dissatisfaction within our own people has not been destructive. The ITN group and the people representing the Northern Quebec Inuit Association made very clear the content of the agreement which would not have been clearly seen to the extent it has if everybody had been satisfied. So generally there has been a very thorough airing of the contents of the agreement exposed to our people. This probably should have been the responsibility of the government partly, to inform the Inuit people on the contents of the agreement and how government works in general. The government should have had a hand in passing the information and making sure that the Inuit people were well informed on what was going on but it ended up that the Northern Quebec Inuit Association representatives and representatives of the opposition group, ITN, taking this responsibility had a very complete presentation to all of Inuit of Northern Quebec about the contents of the agreement.

The Northern Quebec Inuit Association has a responsibility to protect the agreement and to make sure that the agreement is properly legislated.

We feel it is our obligation since we have signed the agreement to make the agreement work, to make it workable,

for the benefit of our people keeping in mind that although the agreement was not fully satisfactory to us, we are willing to live with it and we are prepared to do our part to make sure that the contents of the agreement and the spirit of the agreement is carried out. Although we stated that we have not been satisfied with everything that is in the agreement, we feel that the benefits that we have obtained under the agreement will protect our culture and our way of life sufficiently not only as native people but also as members of Canadian society.

We have also heard in discussions in Parliament by Dr. Holmes and others that the Inuit people need to be heard, their voice needs to be heard and their needs understood but further to being heard and understood we feel that we have to have the means and the tools to carry out our aspirations. We are completely willing to carry out our obligations and our commitments to ensure that in the future we are included in the various structures of government so that we will not be a burden to the rest of the people that we have to live with and that we will have some self-determination.

And that we have a say in what goes on and in what happens and we have a say in what develops in our region. We feel that the various government structures should take into consideration what the Inuit people have to contribute. We feel that we have a unique contribution to make in the power structures that prevail, and we feel that we should not be left on the wayside. We feel we should join in in these activities and structures so that whatever we have to contribute will be of assistance to these structures.

There are, however, some points that we have not been able to include in the negotiations for this agreement. What we consider important in this area is the matter of communications and language in the North. We feel that communications especially should be dealt with in a very proper manner so that the loss of language or the loss of culture would not result from the coming of supercommunication systems to the North. And we intend to deal with this matter of communication needs this coming year.

There are certain issues that we are concerned about that are still outstanding. Issues that are not finished. First of all, there is a matter of land selection. The selection of land that we obtained under the agreement has not been completely resolved to our satisfaction.

Secondly, the amendment that we have proposed to Bill C-9 has also not been resolved as yet.

Thirdly, the matter of extinguishment of rights of Port Burwell Inuit in all of Canada stated in the agreement. We have not had a satisfactory resolution of this particular problem yet.

Fourthly, the cost of the long term negotiations which were to be recovered and reimbursed to us and the fifth issue is the lawful spouse issue in the agreement.

These five points that are so outstanding in the negotiations are in the brief that you have and we have recommended certain solutions ourselves to you regarding these problems which we would want to be taken under consideration

before passage of Bill C-9.

We feel that these outstanding issues should not be left unsolved. We feel that it is within the spirit of the agreement to ensure that these issues are resolved in a satisfactory manner. If you are concerned about the execution of the agreement and if you are concerned about the concerns of the Inuit of Northern Quebec. We feel that the solutions that we have proposed are very reasonable and that you should ensure that these solutions be carried out without any unreasonable delay.

We are also aware that the government or our Parliament in dealing with certain legislations have haggled and caused long and unnecessary delays in certain matters. If this is going to happen here about the passage of legislation of the agreement, I would like you to think very seriously about what the Inuit in northern Quebec might do if passage of the agreement is not dealt with in a smooth and satisfactory manner.

There are still other matters of concern outstanding pertaining to federal undertakings. In matters regarding migratory birds and marine mammals there is still need to resolve laws governing these, federal laws governing these two subjects especially. These two issues do not concern only the people of northern Quebec, these are national issues and they will have to be dealt with by the national organization known as Inuit Tapuritsit of Canada.

To go back to our earlier statement about what we feel are the benefits that we have obtained under the

agreement and to show you that we can live with the agreement and grow with it, I would like to point out three major things contained in it that will be of tremendous benefit to the Inuit people of northern Quebec.

There are provisions for local government formation in the various communities in northern Quebec. Local governments with authority, local governments that are recognized along with this provision there... attached to this provision there is a provision for a regional government that will have authority over north of the 55th parallel in northern Quebec. The government structure is as stipulated in the agreement we feel are satisfactory to the present situation and to the present conditions in northern Quebec. We feel we can grow with these provisions.

There is also the hunting, fishing and trapping regime that has been set up in the agreement for the protection of Inuit traditional hunting, fishing and trapping activity. We feel we are protected sufficiently in these hunting, fishing and trapping areas in the agreement.

There are also provisions for Inuit social and economic development which previously did not exist in the degree that they will exist when the agreement is carried out.

We feel in giving these examples that these are good things about the agreement and therefore the agreement needs to be protected and needs to be carried out.

I am sorry if this seems a bit like a history lesson but I feel that people dealing with the agreement need to know the events leading up to it and need to know what is before

you did not materialize out of nowhere and for no reason.

Taking this into consideration we hope that we have given you a better insight in our views on the agreement and we thank you for taking the time to listen to us.