

An environmental panel looking at the acceptability of low level military flight training over Innu land in Labrador reported that land claims in jurisdictions must be dealt with quickly. This is a critical issue which the government must pursue as soon as possible.

The list goes on. Currently committees of the House are examining the issues of self-government, of aboriginal education, of aboriginal fishing and economic development, of mental health among aboriginal people and the future of resource management in areas where aboriginal communities are located.

There is an urgent need for Canadians of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to acknowledge the history, heritage and future of Canada's first peoples. The adoption of a day of solidarity is certainly one small step in the right direction.

In my own constituency much is happening in this regard. Within the aboriginal communities chiefs like the late Big Bear, Poundmaker, Ahtakakooop and Seekaskoch are focal points for the development of interpretive and educational centres. Non-aboriginal communities have begun to sponsor or jointly host powwows and other cross cultural activities.

Individuals like the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nation's Chief Blaine Favel have talked about the need to foster stronger human and economic ties between non-aboriginal and aboriginal communities and people. Tribal councils like the Meadow Lake Tribal Council are demonstrating that successful aboriginal businesses can contribute a great deal to the success of neighbouring non-aboriginal communities. There are negatives and positives in the relationships that exist between our societies. If we are ever to overcome the negatives and make the future positive we must take a few small steps first. This bill sponsored by the hon. member for Kamloops and supported by the hon. member for Regina—Lumsden and other members of the House provides us with just such an opportunity.

• (1745)

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise to support this bill. I commend the hon. member for Kamloops for bringing it to the House. The day which he talks about would be a day of reflection.

I would like to quote Georges Erasmus, who said:

The history of our people needs to be told. We need to present accurately what happened in the past, so that we can deal with it in the future—I don't like what has happened over the last 500 years. We can't do much about that. But what are we going to do about the next 500 years? What are we going to do about the next ten years?

On this day of reflection these are the things which we should be thinking about. We should be thinking about the fact that when the Europeans landed here the Indians fed them, showed them how to avoid scurvy and asked for nothing. They asked Jacques Cartier for nothing. We should reflect on the Truro

wampum, the covenant chain, the broken treaties, the food which they gave us.

My background is Irish and Italian. The Irish think that the potato came from Ireland. It came from the Indians. The Italians think the tomato came from Italy. It came from the Indians. They had over 1,200 different plants when we arrived. It was a self-sufficient nation.

We should reflect on their path of tears. We took away their voice. We made them non-persons. We put them on reserves. We put them in residential schools. It was not good enough to put them in residential schools, we moved them to other provinces. It was not good enough that they were in schools in other provinces, we said: "You shall not go home from the age of six to eighteen". They did not go home, not even for Christmas or holidays. Then we decided we would take away their language and their culture. To back all of this up and to make the kids go to residential schools we invented the pass laws. If the parents did not give up their kids to go to these schools they did not get a pass to leave the reserves.

Show me an Irish family or an Italian family or any other family that came to this country and was treated like that. In other words, the visitors to this country were treated better than the people who had been here for 10,000 years. We should reflect on that.

My friend reminded us that we should reflect on the Indian Act. It is archaic. It is an act which should not exist in any country.

We should reflect on the dams at Grand Rapids, Churchill, Nelson and Cheslatta that took away their livelihood. We took away their very being. We should reflect on what we did to the Haida Gwaii and the Micmac with our development of the forests. We should reflect on what we did with minerals. Because we needed minerals in northern Ontario, in came the Robinson Superior treaties. That is why we have those treaties, because we needed minerals.

In my area we took away the sturgeon and the wild rice. Not only were they food sources, they were religious things to them. They were there for generations and then they were gone.

We should remember our land grabs on those days, and the people who have come and gone: the Elijah Smiths; the elders of the Yukon; Jake Fire of the Mohawks, a traditionalist who came to a meeting unarmed and was shot; Frank Calder and the Sparrows. These are not individuals, these are families. For three generations the Sparrow family in B.C. has been saying the same thing. We should reflect on that and we should remember.

We should also reflect on what they are doing. They now have over 5,000 businesses, representing 31,000 employees. Twenty-five years ago only 600 to 800 aboriginal students were in post-secondary schools. Today, as I stand here, they have