

Private Members' Business

The hon. member's bill is very worthy of our consideration and debate. This is particularly true as we approach 1993.

The United Nations has declared 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. I think it is appropriate that the United Nations recognizes the contribution of indigenous people around the world in an appropriate fashion. In fact, the Government of Canada has been moving in that direction, in its own way, during the course of the last months. Agriculture Canada sponsored the first ever federal Aboriginal Awareness Week from May 20 to May 22. Just recently the department challenged other departments to participate and many have.

• (1120)

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development held a Native Awareness Day focusing on employment issues. Other federal departments are preparing to participate in the International Year for Indigenous People which begins on December 10, two days hence.

In approaching this issue, I believe there are some important matters which should be considered. First, it would be very important to hear from the aboriginal leadership on this issue because it is important that they be consulted and be a part in the process. One of the things that troubles me about aboriginal-government relationships during the course of the last few decades is that very often it is a case of one side doing something for the other side. There is a degree of implied paternalism and, in fact, real paternalism in that.

That process can no longer be accepted. What is important now is that the principle of partnership be very much agreed upon. Prior to the passage of such a motion, it would be important that consultation occur, and if there is agreement that this day should be recognized in this appropriate manner, then the wording of the bill would have to be influenced by that as well as the choice of the date.

I would also hope that such a day, provided it was agreed upon, would recognize the culture and the contribution of all aboriginal groups in Canada, non-status as well as status Indians, Inuit and Métis. This type of

clarification would be helpful in securing the objective of the bill.

One of the difficulties I have with Bill C-268, as worded, is with the use of the word solidarity. This may be due to my own difficulty in understanding the meaning of that word. The word as used in our recent history has had political connotations and sometimes confrontational connotations. One of the things that should be consulted and considered during the consultation process is the use of that word. My personal opinion is that perhaps another word might be more appropriate.

The aboriginal people of Canada had a self-sustaining, self-supporting, self-government in place prior to the coming of the Europeans. It was a society which was not free, but relatively free of conflict. It was a society in which there was a very significant role for women as well as men. It was a society in which people were proud of their achievements.

There is a great deal which we in Canada today can learn from the role of aboriginals in our history as well as the result of their participation in today's society. It is important that we treat this proposal with respect just as it is very very important that we enhance our understanding of the aspirations of the aboriginal community as it exists today.

During the course of the weekend, when I was back in my constituency of Brandon, I had a fairly long discussion with one of the chiefs from a nearby community. While we did not agree on each and every point during the course of our discussion, I was reminded of the role of the First Nations in Canada. I would certainly suggest to the House that we should give very careful consideration to the principle of the motion which is before us.

Prior to reaching a resolution on this matter, I would suggest that we would want to consult very carefully with the aboriginal community itself to determine what its views are on this very important matter.

Mr. Jack Iyerak Anawak (Nunatsiak):

[Editor's Note: Member spoke in Inuktitut]

[English]

Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak on Bill C-268. I must say that it is a nice gesture. At this point I think the only way we can look at it is as a nice gesture.