

Private Members' Business

Then the colonizers arrived. The settlers arrived. They met a relatively welcoming culture, a welcoming people who introduced them to the realities of living in this part of the globe. One can imagine the incredible suffering that would have occurred with some of these original settlers if the original inhabitants of those areas were not there offering co-operation, support, guidance and help at virtually every turn.

Things took a turn for the worse. It was then that we as a non-aboriginal culture began to practice what can only be called cultural genocide in many cases with intent, in other cases indirectly. The reality was disease, sickness, illness, violence and all sorts of aspects resulted in the genocide of aboriginal cultures, almost to their extinction.

Right now as we speak there are only a handful of original aboriginal languages left in the country. Thank goodness that at the 11th hour we have to give full credit to the aboriginal leaders across the country who stood up and said: "This is the end. We will now reverse this process". Through incredible leadership they have reversed the process of cultural extinction. Today aboriginal cultures from coast to coast are probably richer, more vibrant and more dynamic than they have been for a long time.

I want to refer to a number of aboriginal leaders in my constituency. Every member could stand in their place this afternoon and do the same. There are outstanding individuals who in a number of ways through their leadership ability and commitment to not only advancing the cause of their own peoples but the country as a whole have made these tremendous gains possible.

I refer to people like Chief Nathan Matthew, Chief Manny Jules, Chief Ron Ignace, Chief Richard LeBourdais and many others from the Shuswap nation of central British Columbia. I acknowledge those same statements could be made for aboriginal leaders from coast to coast.

Mr. Solomon: Chief Sol Sanderson from Saskatchewan.

Mr. Riis: Chief Sol Sanderson from Saskatchewan and David Ahenakew and others as my colleague says. There are so many. We owe them so much.

We must consider that before us in the next number of years probably the most important social issue will be the relationship between aboriginal people and non-aboriginal people and sorting out this complex and growing relationship.

I refer to the emerging reality of self-government, of self-determination and of self-reliance for aboriginal peoples, the resolution of land claims, cultural preservation, social and economic development, educational training and general cultural advancement.

I acknowledge the minister of Indian and northern affairs who has in his own way provided much needed leadership in a variety of these areas.

• (1740)

When we look at the last 18 months, there have been significant advancements in terms of a move toward self-government, self-determination and self-reliance, particularly for progressive Indian bands across the country to say nothing of the Inuit, Dene and Metis advancements as well.

In order to permit my hon. colleague to say a few words, I will conclude my remarks by saying that at a crucial time in the First Nation's evolution in our part of North America, it is very appropriate for us as parliamentarians on behalf of those we represent to extend a hand in acknowledgement of the contributions made by the First Nations.

We must tell them we recognize and appreciate those accomplishments and that we would like to work co-operatively, positively together for the advancement not only of aboriginal peoples across Canada but Canadians generally. We do acknowledge the existence of First Nations and what that entails.

I would like to finish my remarks by referring to the Indian Act and how this act, in my judgment, was a lie from the beginning. The lie is betrayed in the first line of the act: "This is an act respecting Indian people". This was not an act respecting Indian people and it is for that reason I ask my colleagues to extend a hand now and recognize June 21 as a solidarity day for aboriginal peoples.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the fine motion presented today by my colleague from Kamloops. It is a motion to recognize a day of solidarity with aboriginal peoples. It shows a lot of understanding of the challenges that face our societies.

I would like to think that every day I stand in solidarity with aboriginal peoples. However, that is not the case across the country. It would be very useful to have a day to specifically remind ourselves of the injustices to native people and that there are specific things we need to do to address those injustices and meet future challenges.

The royal commission on aboriginal peoples has released an interim report on suicide. We must actively work to address the recommendations on that issue.

The Senate has just released a report on the treatment of aboriginal veterans from World War I, World War II and the Korean war. We must as a nation actively work to address the grievances of aboriginal veterans.

The House of Commons standing committee on Indian affairs has in the past reported on the lack and the inadequacy of housing in aboriginal communities. This issue must be immediately addressed.