

Suggested National Indian Day

● (5:30 p.m.)

to invest a substantial sum of money in an Indian pavilion at the world exhibition site. The amount mentioned in the announcement is approximately \$1 million. I am confident this pavilion will do honour to all our Indian citizens and I am sure it will be one of the most visited places at our world exhibition. The show promises to be top notch. If I am not mistaken, we will have Indians from every province in Canada including representatives from British Columbia with their famous totem poles. We will have exhibitions of the varying cultures which exist among our Indian population in Canada. All in all I am confident the pavilion will be one of the smash hits of the 1967 world exhibition, and I am extremely happy that the government has decided to go along with the idea of building a pavilion.

I think the most important thing which will result from the creation of a national Indian day is that it will help to stimulate self-pride and help preserve the various cultures which exist among our Indian population. Over the years we have heard a great number of solutions proposed in respect of the problems which beset our Indian people. The solution which continues to come forward in one form or another is complete assimilation and integration into our society, with the disappearance of the reserve system. I certainly think it is to the advantage of our Indians if they are integrated into our economic way of life and this necessarily implies social adaptation and integration on their part. This is a process which has been going on gradually for a long time. The explosive growth in the population of Indians now necessitates much more rapid economic and social integration.

What the Indians fear and what often turns them against this necessary social and economic integration is that their culture too will be integrated and assimilated and therefore disappear. This is a justifiable fear. It is for this reason that I personally favour the retention, at least in southern Quebec and southern Ontario where I know the situation, of the reserve system because I believe it is only within the reserves that there lies any hope of cultural preservation. The creation of an Indian day for Canada would contribute to this necessary cultural preservation. It is this problem above all which I think concerns so many of the educated and articulate young Indians who now are emerging from our educational system and who are taking their part in the mainstream of Canadian life.

It would be my hope that the creation of a national Indian day would contribute to the self-pride and self-confidence which our Indian people must have if they are to preserve their culture and be able to enter into the mainstream of life. There certainly is no lack of self-confidence among the Indian people of Caughnawaga or St. Regis whom I represent. I think there is a lack of self-confidence among Indian people in other parts of Canada. This is probably the thing that holds Indians back from playing a full role in our society and economy. I believe that the Canadian government in its policies toward Indians over the years is in large part responsible for this lack of self-confidence. The paternalism which guided the policies of the Indian affairs branch until very recently did far more harm than good to our Indian people. I believe that if they had been left completely on their own for 75 years up to 1963 our Indian people would have been far better off.

However, Mr. Speaker, this paternalism has come to an end. The head of the department is, I think, an excellent man and the budget of the department has recently been more than doubled. I am fully confident that in the next few years the so-called Indian problem in Canada will largely disappear and we will see a full flowering of Indian culture throughout this country.

There is one other point I wish to make. I hope this matter is not open to criticism too much longer but another measure that continues to hold back our Indian population is the Indian Act. I do not believe that anywhere in Canada are the inadequacies of the Indian Act more evident than in its application to the reserve at Caughnawaga. Here is a reserve that is part of Montreal suburbia; yet the people living there are subject to the same rules and regulations that apply to marshland Indians living in the James Bay area or east or west of Hudson Bay.

The application of this act to Indians living on a reserve such as Caughnawaga just does not make any sense. It is essential that the Department of Indian Affairs and the government now move rapidly to alter the Indian Act radically. In fact, I think the whole thing should be thrown out and we should start anew with an act that can be applied to southern reserves and those in less developed areas in which our Indian people reside.