

Private Members' Business

I am sure the member for Kamloops initiated this bill with the best of intentions, borne out of concern for recognition of the contribution of native cultures to the Canadian mosaic. Canadians are proud of the uniqueness of native cultures and their contribution to what we call Canada. From coast to coast, respective Indian tribes have brought their own specific background and history to what we have built in this country. We in Canada are all unique as a consequence of native cultural contributions and from those cultural contributions brought by others over the past centuries. That understanding and respect for many cultures is why Canada stands as a beacon of tolerance, compassion and stability.

• (1810)

Since becoming a member of Parliament, I have met and visited with aboriginal people from every region of Canada. The diversity among aboriginal peoples is obvious and they are the original Canadians. Their cultural legacy is a major contributing reason why Canada is different from the United States. Canadians enjoy this distinction.

I do urge caution in playing politics with the dynamism of native cultures. Our native people are a sensitive, intelligent and proud people who, despite years of inequities, outright discrimination at times and at other times criminal mishandling of their affairs by others, have continued to carry on their cultural pursuits and have developed a community of interest.

My party supports native peoples' independence and full-fledged partnership in this country, we support their self-sufficiency, and we support the removal of the albatross of the Department of Indian Affairs from their necks. We support their advancement, not a reinforcement of the past.

As I said previously, theirs is a dynamic culture that deserves to grow and flourish no less than any other in this country. The tremendous cultural contribution native peoples have brought to this country stands on its own merit. It is a rich and endearing culture, not one to be isolated and ghettoized, as we did under section 91.24 of the BNA Act and then again under many aspects of the Indian Act. This is what our native cultures are trying to shake off. The surly bonds of colonialism must be relinquished.

As I understand it, recognition by this Parliament of a day of recognition is innocuous in that there is no statutory holiday or out-of-pocket expenses associated with this recognition.

Is it necessary to talk about national solidarity for aboriginal peoples? This has connotations of Poland climbing out from under the yolk of communist oppression. Surely, we can celebrate aboriginal culture without calling it Solidarity Day. This

sounds confrontational. Let us not build walls. Let us nourish without singling out or separating our aboriginal peoples from the mainstream. Let us build on our strengths, our consensus, the very thing that has been the strength of Canada in the face of adversity.

Canadian consensus, more than any other government action, has protected the minority against the tyranny of the majority in modern times.

Mr. John Murphy (Annapolis Valley—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in this debate. I would like to commend the hon. member for Kamloops for bringing this issue to the floor of the House of Commons.

It has long been an important premise of this country that we work to achieve equality in this society. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case. For hundreds of years aboriginal people have not been afforded the same opportunities as many Canadians. It is time to attempt to correct these past wrongs. That is why this government is committed to taking action to help aboriginal people assume their rightful role as full partners in Canadian society.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, I would like to focus my comments on the work the government is doing in consultation with aboriginal communities and organizations. In our red book we dedicated an entire chapter to aboriginal issues. Most important in our platform was the recognition of the inherent right of self-government.

• (1815)

In January 1994 the minister launched a national consultation process on how best to implement the inherent right. With these consultations now almost completed, I feel confident that we have some very exciting times ahead.

I would like to focus on three areas that are fundamental to achieving our goals: resolving land claims; changing the Indian Act; and dismantling the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

First we need to try to create certainty with respect to aboriginal rights and title as well as opportunities for economic development in aboriginal communities. Resolving outstanding land claims is part of that solution.

Claims fall into two categories: specific and comprehensive. The specific ones arise from the alleged non-fulfilment of treaties and other lawful obligations such as the Indian Act. Since coming to power our government has settled over 50 claims of this nature in all parts of Canada. Comprehensive claims, on the other hand, are based on the concept of continuing