

Government Orders

I want to give members an overview of the issues which the aboriginal peoples of our country are faced with today. I am not convinced that a new department of multiculturalism and citizenship will address the crisis with which native people are trying to cope. Indian and Inuit leaders often argue that real progress for their people depends upon the satisfactory settlement of land claims and the attainment of self government. But these are far from being the only questions facing native peoples today. There are critical problems in the area of employment and services, as there are with the justice system, and with the Indian Act itself.

Compared to other countries, the native people of Canada are well off, because we are not being slaughtered as they are in Brazil or elsewhere. But we can also learn from them, and we are involved more and more in the international links that are being created. For instance, at the United Nations there is now a working group looking at indigenous rights around the world. A draft universal declaration of indigenous rights is being put together. Canadian native people are trying to organize themselves so that we can have a single voice at the international level.

• (1230)

Another initiative they have been pushing for is an international year for indigenous people. It appears that 1993 may be the year.

Native organizations are concerned about what new legislation means to them and their programs and services. There is an immense task before us if we are to create a climate to which our energies are to be used to heal and develop native communities.

The Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations has outlined a number of steps that the government can take to arrive at the situation. First, forums need to be established to resolve outstanding items on the Canada-First Nations agenda. A process is also required for native people to acquire full control in the areas of education, justice, child care and health. Legislation is required to recognize the continuing and inherent right of the First Nations to govern themselves in these areas.

Finally native people need an early resumption of the constitutional process. We are not asking for special treatment; we are asking to become what we always have been and what we always were—first Canadians and Canadians first.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Maheu: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member from the Arctic to deviate just a little from her text. When we speak about multiculturalism I wonder if she was present earlier today when members of this House referred to the department of multiculturalism as being one which handed out subsidies to various ethnic groups, song and dance, if you will.

Normally when groups in my riding receive grants for their community projects, as their member I am informed about the projects and have often presented cheques. When it comes to multicultural groups, at least in Saint-Laurent—Cartierville and I understand that the same phenomenon applies to the neighbouring riding of Mount Royal, our present minister personally hand delivers his cheques to the multicultural groups.

We talked about patronizing this morning or vote buying if you will. I would like our member and others to address this subject and to make comments on that.

Mr. Della Noce: She is young.

Ms. Blondin: Madam Speaker, all that I can say with regard to this particular issue—

Mr. Della Noce: Naive.

Ms. Blondin: I am not naive. I am 38 years old. I am a politician. I have equal rights with every other member in this House. I would like to answer this question if the member opposite would give me the opportunity to do so.

I would like to say that it is generally the practice of the various departments in issuing grants and contributions to allow the member to participate in that process. I do not feel that it is morally right, for one, to have the minister handing out and not sharing in that activity with the local member and with other senior executives or senior government members of that particular region. I think there is some concern about the way in which this is done and I think it is something that has to be examined. Otherwise the perception is that it is generally vote buying.

Mr. Nunziata: Madam Speaker, my colleague from the Arctic has injected into this debate an interesting element, and that is the status of the aboriginal people, the native people in Canada and their role in Canadian society.