

Private Members' Business

of clothing such as moccasins. They taught us how to use furs and certain skills such as how to survive in the bush, how to trap animals and how to hunt. All of this we learnt from the aboriginal people.

We should use this day to increase our knowledge of each other's cultures which unfortunately, as I see it, have become increasingly isolated in the past number of decades.

So the answer is not the red book or the Canadian Constitution. It is up to us individually to have an open mind and be receptive to the other culture. We must show compassion, we must listen and we should keep an open mind. We should not let ourselves be polarized by our differences: the Canadian nation, the Quebec nation and the aboriginal nation. We should try to understand each other and be generous and open. If we do that, June 21 will only make us richer, and I think this day should be an opportunity for us to learn as much as we can about aboriginal culture, and we in the Bloc Québécois will be delighted to support this motion.

[English]

Ms. Jean Augustine (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise to address and support Bill C-244, which proposes to recognize June 21 as a national solidarity day for aboriginal peoples.

In the last two weeks Canadians have demonstrated an understanding of the important principles behind this bill, principles of celebrating equality and partnerships. Last Friday, aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians from across the country, including the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, gathered in Vancouver to celebrate the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards. Fourteen aboriginal Canadians were honoured for their outstanding contributions. On Thursday evening at nine o'clock, all Canadians can share in this celebration because it is being televised nationally on our CBC.

• (1805)

Canadians also celebrated the uniqueness of our cultures and heritage on March 26 at the annual Juno awards. A touching tribute to Buffy Sainte-Marie in particular highlighted the central role of aboriginal cultures in defining the broader Canadian culture.

This is what we are talking about today, marking the achievement of aboriginal people and their tremendous contributions to this great nation. These contributions span the spectrum from politics, business and law to entertainment, athletics and culinary experience.

For generations aboriginal people have made a visible, internationally recognized contribution that has for too long been largely unrecognized in our country. I firmly believe in the principle of this motion, as does the government and everyone on this side of the House.

We had these very principles in mind when we sat down to write our red book. Our goal was and is for a future where aboriginal people enjoy a standard of living and quality of life and opportunity equal to those of other Canadians. Our goal is a future in which aboriginal people live self-reliantly, secure in the knowledge of who they are as unique peoples; a future where all Canadians are enriched by aboriginal cultures and are committed to the fair sharing of the potential of our nation; a future where aboriginal people have the positive option to live and work wherever they choose; and one where aboriginal children grow up in secure families and healthy communities with the opportunity to take their full place in Canada.

This government recognizes the special relationship that exists between aboriginal people, the first inhabitants of this land, and the Crown. We are committed to fulfilling our obligations and to building a new partnership based on trust, mutual respect and participation in the decision-making process.

It was for these reasons that we put aboriginal issues at the forefront of our agenda. I am pleased to see that my hon. colleague from Kamloops also regards aboriginal issues in such a serious manner.

The goal of enabling aboriginal people to assume their rightful place as full partners in Canadian society is not a goal of one group; it is a goal shared by millions of Canadians. Clearly aboriginal issues involve more than just our aboriginal people. They involve each and every one of us. That is why I believe it is important for all Canadians to participate in marking the contributions past, present and future of aboriginal people. In these efforts, our focus should be on partnerships, commemoration and positive action.

Clearly before a decision like this is made, it is essential to seek consent from the aboriginal community. When our ultimate goal is to create a full and equal society, it would clearly be regressive for us to sit here and legislate a special day for aboriginal people without their explicit support.

I strongly feel that the hon. member's bill is worthy of our consideration and debate, particularly as we celebrate the first year of the United Nations International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples. By supporting the United Nations recommendation to pronounce August 9 as an International Day for Indigenous Peoples, we may also have an opportunity to bring aboriginal issues further on to the international stage.

I want to thank my hon. colleague for bringing this bill before us. It is an important reminder that aboriginal issues must continue to be a priority for all Canadians. I thank him for the opportunity to participate in this debate.

Mr. John Duncan (North Island—Powell River, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to participate in this first debate of Bill C-244, an act respecting a national solidarity day for the aboriginal peoples of Canada.