

Private Members' Business

I can say without much fear of contradiction that a lot of it has resulted from a total lack of understanding of aboriginal people, their communities, their societies, their traditions, their histories, their cultures, the way aboriginal people relate to each other, and frankly today the way aboriginal people want to relate to the rest of the country and would like the rest of the country to relate to them.

If we can get some better understanding of that in terms of knowledge, in terms of education and in the end in terms of some practical application of how it is, we can come together to help resolve these problems. But the coming together has to be a recognition that we must, as we do in so many other cases, provide the tools, provide the opportunities and provide the resources for aboriginal people to continue to develop the societies and the cultures that played such a huge role in the development of this country in a very positive and very substantial way.

We must help aboriginal communities maintain the sense of tradition as so many of the rest of us do and insist upon. Unfortunately from time to time we are prepared to deny it to others. We should be able to apply that and help it be applied to 1992 and the year 2000 and beyond. We should be able to say to aboriginal people that how they govern themselves is critical to their ability to grow, to flourish and to carry on. The rest of us should have the ability and the willingness and the understanding to be able to support that process.

Frankly June 21 is as good a day as could we come up with. We have seen it reflected in the Dene and the celebrations they have had of recognition. The aboriginal communities in Toronto have done the same. The AFN in its old form in the past has used the same date. It is symbolic in many ways. It is symbolic in a lot of cultures but no more important than in aboriginal cultures.

I hope we can use it as well to recognize there is not one group of aboriginal people. They are hugely diverse peoples and nations, very diverse cultures, very diverse ethnic backgrounds and very diverse histories. Understanding that difference is essential in understanding the aboriginal people.

I congratulate my colleague across the way for trying to bring some of this together. As my colleague from Brandon—Souris has raised, there are perhaps some

concerns about the way the bill is written. There are some concerns that it include all people, but I think the message is important. We should say to Canadians that it is in all our interests and it is to all our benefit to understand and to express our support for aboriginal people in coming to grips with their concerns. It has to be symbolic but it has to be practical. It cannot simply be a pat on the head. For too long, unfortunately, it has been just that.

Mr. Ron Fisher (Saskatoon—Dundurn): Mr. Speaker, I am more than pleased to stand this morning to speak to Bill C-268, an act cited as a National Day of Solidarity for the First Nations of Canada Act.

I think it is most appropriate that June 21 be the day set aside for this day of solidarity. The first day of summer strikes me as being a time, particularly in Canada, that takes on a significance that only those who live in the northern climes can appreciate. That being the case, I would suggest that it also reflects on the appreciation which we as Canadians have for our First Nations.

There is no way in which we as a nation can make up for past injustices to our First Nations. I am reminded of an incident which occurred just this last summer. I was canvassing door to door but I happened to meet someone on the street. I saw them coming toward me and, as I got closer, I recognized the person as being a young aboriginal person. I stopped and introduced myself, said hello to him and asked how things were going. He said: "Not too well; I have lost my land".

I come from a farm. I suppose all Canadians are well aware that farmers are losing their land at a rather record pace. In my naivety I thought perhaps he was from the agricultural community and had lost his farm. I said: "I am terribly sorry to hear that. Where is your land?", to which he replied: "We are standing on it".

That just goes a short way toward exemplifying the depth to which the aboriginal people have suffered and the understanding as well among themselves of how much they have suffered and how far they have to go. I grant that the setting aside of a day of solidarity with our First Nations is not going to erase the past wrongs, and there are others which I think should probably be mentioned.