

The Address—Mr. Len Marchand

I would like also to pay tribute to another former minister, Hon. J. R. Nicholson, now Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia. I should like to wish him well in his new duties.

Let me also make reference to some of the great work done by two former members of this house who have gone on to the happy hunting ground, Hon. Guy Favreau and Hon. René Tremblay. Much of this great work that was done during Mr. Pearson's régime, was started when these men were in office.

The cost of neglecting this social problem, left unsolved for too long, is very great. This cost in terms of unproductive lives and misery is more than Canada can afford. I have confidence in the present Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien). He is a man with much human understanding. I have confidence that he will do his utmost with the resources parliament makes available to ameliorate and eventually repair this damage to that part of Canadian fabric. I have confidence as well that the Indian people will respond.

Indians are a proud race. We have much in our past of which we are proud. Our culture can make an even greater contribution to Canada than the very considerable one it has already made. There is much about Indian life that is good and there is much for Canadians to learn about it. We have been held back but we are on the move today.

Consultations are now taking place with the Indian people to determine their views about the kind of Indian Act they believe will work best in their own communities. The fact that they are being consulted on such a scale and to such depth augurs well for the future. I do not believe that any country has ever before made the attempt to ascertain so thoroughly the needs of a group of people as has been the case during these discussions. Meetings have been held in the Northwest Territories, the maritimes and Ontario, and next week a team will meet with the spokesmen for the Indians of Saskatchewan. I believe that very few understand how much this means to the Indians. We can speak at those meetings of the effect of the Indian Act on our own communities, and we have an opportunity to explain the needs and the aspirations of our people. Parliament will be better prepared to debate this Indian Act than it has ever been. There is an urgency

[Mr. Marchand (Kamloops-Cariboo).]

here and I hope the new act will not be long delayed.

Not all our problems can be solved by the passing of an act by parliament. If they could, I am sure most of them would long since have been remedied. The solution to the problems of the Indian people will require a combination of effort on the part of all levels of government, of all Canadians including the Indians. With the available resources, this government has shown ample signs of being willing and ready to supply help. I believe Canadians will help when shown what is wanted of them, and the Indian people are showing many signs of their willingness to do their share. Ultimately it will be the efforts of the Indian people that will result in the solution of their problems. Ultimately it will be the Indian people, striving to overcome the barriers, who will make a solution possible.

Mr. Speaker, I hope it will always be possible for me to speak on behalf of my constituents and on behalf of the Indian people. I hope it will be possible for me to discharge both my obligations, for I am very conscious of them.

• (1:10 p.m.)

It is not important to the house that a member is, or is not, an Indian. It is not really important to the people of my riding whether I am Indian or not. It is important to the Indian people to know that one of us can become a member.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Marchand (Kamloops-Cariboo): It is important for the younger Indians who are in school and at university to know that, with reasonable hope, they can aspire to become whatever they wish to become and are capable of becoming. It is important for all Canada to know that this is not a land of bigotry and prejudice. It is important for all Canadians to keep it that way.

Although the Indian people once held all this land and now have but little of it, although the Indian once was the master of his environment and is no longer, it is less than helpful to repine for a past that is gone; it is less than useful to yearn for other times when things were different. No one can turn back the clock. The useful, the important and the right thing to do is to master the environment that is. The younger Indian is using the opportunities provided for his schooling. He is taking advantage of education and of