

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Bevilacqua: Madam Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member. It is in relation to the debate we are having today which I think is a debate of importance. It is a debate that I think deals with defining the very essence of Canadian culture and who we are as a people. There are certain things that concern me about the present direction of multiculturalism. Sometimes I think the message gets lost, not only outside but even within this Chamber.

For example, I gather from what the member stated culture is multiculturalism. My question is quite simple. If that is indeed the fact, then why do we have a parliamentary standing committee that calls itself the communications, culture, citizenship and multiculturalism committee? I would like to know what groups are represented within the culture portion of this parliamentary standing committee and what groups are represented within the multiculturalism portion of this committee. Are we four solitudes of this nation?

[Translation]

Ms. Roy-Arcelin: Madam Speaker, I think that we granted the wishes of our friends in the opposition because the members of the multiculturalism committee asked for multiculturalism to be separate from communications. So we granted their wish.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Resuming debate.

[English]

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-18, an act to establish the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship, with the belief that this is a sincere effort on the part of this government to address the changing demographic reality in Canada. This bill recognizes that Canada is no longer a bicultural English-French nation, but a country constructed and reborn from many different heritages and backgrounds.

• (1130)

Roughly 40 per cent of today's population is neither of British nor French origin. This new reality of cultural pluralism presents a tremendous challenge for our nation.

But to effect real change we have to change attitudes as well as policy. In the past, Canada has had a relatively good record of addressing the needs of new Canadians and being sensitive to their concerns. Honest attempts have been made to recognize the intrinsic value that each new culture brings with it and the tremendous contribution that immigrants have made in the building of this nation. It is an eclectic identity that has thrived on its diversity and not been weakened by it.

The future of Canada hinges on the harmonious development of a self-confident society, on a society flexible enough to adapt and preserve positive elements from the many cultures of the world. This is a nation where any individual from any culture has the chance to come and start a new life. Canada has become an example to the world of how people of different backgrounds can work together for the common wheel. Our country is now a blueprint for the global village.

In principle Bill C-18 is well intentioned, but there are dangerous pitfalls in the undertaking of this pursuit. Ideally a multicultural policy should attempt to address the various issues of employment equity, racism, discrimination, integration, and training programs. These are good starting blocks, but the record so far has sadly fallen short of the ideal. The government has not been particularly successful in ensuring employment equity even within its own sphere of control. We need to look no further than the post office to measure how well this policy has been implemented.

According to the Canadian Ethnocultural Council only 4 per cent of the workforce of Canada Post are visible minorities. Compare this figure to the private sector as a whole where 6.3 per cent of the workforce are visible minorities. The discrepancy between the government's employment equity dream quest and the actual results is just as worrisome in other areas under government jurisdiction such as CBC and Bell Canada.

The existing legislation designed to end discrimination and ensure equality has clearly failed in the public sector. Unfortunately policies and programs aimed at ethnic minorities have often meant little more than bread and circuses. Ethnic communities are treated as something apart from so-called main stream society.