

Government Orders

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—St. Clair): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to my colleague intently. I think all of us appreciate the comments that he has made and the view of his country that that reflects. I think it is a view of the country and a concern about some things that are happening in this country that many Canadians share.

He would be aware, however, that no matter how salutary this motion is it has precious little to do with the events to which he referred. As a matter of fact, perhaps the most significant aspect about this resolution is that it pays no attention whatever to the sexist remarks and the racist remarks to which he referred.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, you may recall that when the Prime Minister responded to our leader in respect to the imposition of particular sanctions for sexist or racist remarks, one got a clear indication that the Prime Minister did not seem to understand the significant difference between general bad behaviour and individual insults and what was represented by the sexist remarks and racist remarks to which we are now referring.

Insults are directed at individuals and individuals are hurt. Those are not appropriate to the decorum of the House. But I wonder if my hon. colleague would agree with me that it is tragic that the difference between individual insults and class oriented insults or group insults or deprecatory remarks is much more substantial in their significance to this House because this House represents Canada. We have now come to accept Canada as a diverse nation made up of different groups of men and women of different colours, different national origins, different sexual orientation and different languages. When any of those groups are insulted in this place, we are insulting the very fabric of this nation. It does damage to the symbolism of this House and its substantive function in this nation.

I wonder if my colleague agrees with that analysis. I also wonder whether my colleague agrees with the analysis that is applicable to the general issue of the tenure of this place and its alleged lack of decorum. When I came into this House, in that spot over there, and stood up for the first time to ask a question I was in awe. I had been chosen in a nation which had shown that it had become a very different nation by choosing me.

This nation told me that by being elected by my constituents I could come here and change things and influence what the government has done and would do. I have come here for seven years, day after day. I have seen that there is no real impact on what this government does. When I perceive and have to explain to my constituents that I have no more power than they have to change this government, is it any wonder that the frustration loose in the land should be reflected here?

I wonder if my hon. colleague in respect to that analysis agrees with me that one way of improving the decorum of this place is to make it a far more democratic institution than it has been since this government has been in office.

Mr. Peterson: My hon. friend, Mr. Speaker, from Windsor—St. Clair has expressed a number of very important ideas. It would be very nice if when 80 per cent of Canadians, or more, spoke out against the GST that this House could have in some way reflected that view of Canadians.

It would have been very nice if when most Canadians disapproved of the economic policies of this government, which created a made-in-Canada recession, we could have reversed those policies so that we did not have the needless job losses and the hurt to individuals, a hurt which was reflected in the frustration we members feel.

My friend talks about two types of wrongs in this House. Wrongs against individual members go with the job. We are going to be insulted at times even by members of our own families. As members, we expect to be insulted from across the floor. Maybe insult is not the right word. We expect to have strong disagreements. I hope it would be on that basis, not on the basis of personality.

My good friend is quite right when he says that insults against groups are not insults against individuals in this House. There are insults against key core components and groups of Canadians. You cannot tell me what a Canadian is without mentioning first of all that we are a tremendously diverse, different group of people. There is no necessarily common thread when you look at language, sex, religion, culture, background, ethnic origin. Every one of us is a minority.

Probably the most significantly Canadian group are Canada's aboriginal peoples. They are different as well.