

Government Orders

and signed by the President of that Council, Mr. Lewis Chan, the Council indicated to the government that it can support Bill C-18 only if substantive amendments are made to it and if assurances are given in the budget that the multiculturalism program will be maintained and strengthened.

Unfortunately, the serious amendments that the hon. member for Vancouver East proposed have been ruled out of order. Therefore we could not debate the substance of the very amendments that the Council would like included in the bill. If the government is truly serious about substance, then it can do the honourable thing: withdraw the bill and start anew so that we will have a bill that is meaningful for all Canadians.

On the second point, in 1988 during the election, the Tory government promised many things to the multicultural community in an obvious attempt to win votes. When it again formed the government, it reneged on its promises. What it means is that either the government has no credibility at all, or it has no credibility in its policy on multiculturalism. I will submit it has neither.

Also, the Council has recommended—I would like the government to listen, Mr. Speaker, through you—that the creation of a ministerial advisory committee be delayed, because this advisory committee will cause the government about \$500,000 a year. That money can be reallocated to fund community programs that will mean programs for the communities that the whole policy ought to serve. The Minister for Multiculturalism apparently failed to heed the submissions of the Canadian Ethnocultural Council

On February 21, 1990, a letter again addressed to the same minister and signed by the President of the Council indicates that the Council remains “alarmed” that \$23 million were cut from the yearly budget of the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Citizenship. What this means is that there will be a decrease in the effectiveness of programming for multiculturalism. Second, the credibility of the policy of this government is thrown into question; and third, the very commitment of this government to multiculturalism seems to have no meaning at all.

The same Council is equally “dismayed” that the government’s support for heritage languages schools has been eliminated. When I spoke on this bill when it was debated on first reading, I said that we must enshrine the principles that all our ethnic groups are equal, that all our cultures deserve respect and dignity and that cultural pluralism must receive official support. I indicated as well during that debate that the establishment of a department of multiculturalism and citizenship is an important step in the right direction.

The events that have since then transpired make me question now whether I can continue to give my support to this bill. When a national organization committed to multiculturalism, committed to recognition of diversity in the country and committed to equality for all Canadians makes substantive proposals that this government refuses to accept, even for the amendment on the definition of multiculturalism itself, then I must say that I would find it difficult to continue to support this bill.

I urge, during this period of need for co-operation and national unity, the top-notch issue across the country today, that we accept this amendment so that we can continue to step forward and together, call ourselves Canadians and equal.

• (1640)

Mr. Dan Heap (Trinity—Spadina): Mr. Speaker, it is with mixed feelings that I rise to speak on Bill C-18, an act to establish the department of multiculturalism and citizenship.

In the beginning, I believe there was a possibility that it could be a useful act creating a useful department. When we were debating it at second reading, I pointed out at the time that there were serious weaknesses. I hoped that the government would pay some heed to members on this side of the House. I hoped even more that the government would pay some heed to the most interested public groups such as those represented in the Canada Ethnocultural Council, which took the trouble to give its views in a constructive way to the government at the end of last year. However, it seems that the government has decided not to listen to anybody. We hear that the government lead speaker opposes even the idea of putting in a definition of multiculturalism. The amendment that we are discussing would add these words: