

Multiculturalism

building should be paramount. Nation-building should be our focal point. Multiculturalism should be treated no differently.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions or comments. Debate. The Hon. Member for York South—Weston.

Mr. John Nunziata (York South—Weston): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to make some brief submissions with respect to the Bill before the House today, entitled “An Act to establish the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship and to amend certain Acts in relation thereto”.

• (1750)

As you know, Mr. Speaker, last year the Parliament of Canada passed a Multiculturalism Act. That was the first Act on multiculturalism in Canada. It was a declared policy of the Government of Canada to have multiculturalism as its official policy.

I have some very serious difficulties in understanding what multiculturalism means. I would submit to you that it does not mean what it is supposed to mean in practice in Canada according to the dictionary definition of multiculturalism. Permit me the opportunity to explain.

Multiculturalism means multi, many. It should mean everybody. It should mean anglophones and francophones and those with Italian origin, Greek origin and German origin. That is what it ought to mean in the pure sense of the word. Unfortunately, since the introduction of the policy of multiculturalism in Canada, it has come to mean something different and that is what causes me considerable concern. It has come to mean that if you have origins other than French or English then you are multicultural, you are an immigrant, an ethnic. I regret that very much that as a policy of the Government of Canada there is a clear distinction between francophones and anglophones on the one hand and the multiculturals or the immigrants and sons and daughters of immigrants on the other hand.

I would not have any difficulties if we all considered ourselves part of the multicultural community but we do not. That is a reality. If you ask average Canadians what multiculturalism means, they certainly exclude French

Canadians and English Canadians. I would suspect that if the Government of Canada were to do a survey or conduct a poll asking Canadians what multiculturalism means, I would suspect that the large majority of Canadians who answered such a poll would define it as being anything other than French or English.

The policy of multiculturalism in practice is divisive in my view. It has been rendered divisive. It renders a certain group of Canadians to be a different type—and I don't want to use the term second class or third class—it renders them different. It puts them on the periphery.

I was reading the Multiculturalism Act passed by Parliament last year. In the last recital, it states:

AND WHEREAS the Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society—

Where have we heard that term “fundamental characteristic of Canadian society” before? We heard it in the Meech Lake Accord. When the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and 10 First Ministers got together, they tried to define what Canada means, what it means to be a Canadian. They referred to certain fundamental characteristics and the language is here, used in the Multiculturalism Act. When they talk about fundamental characteristics in the Meech Lake Accord, they refer to French-speaking Canadians and English-speaking Canadians as if to suggest that those were the only fundamental characteristics of Canada.

My mother, an immigrant to this country, does not speak fluent French. She does not speak fluent English and by implication, therefore, she is not a fundamental characteristic of Canada. Nor are the hundreds of thousands of other Canadians who have origins other than French or English.

I argued and others argued at the time of the Meech Lake debate that if you are truly defining the essence of Canada and what Canada is, you surely must include as fundamental characteristics the immigrants who came here and chose Canada as their homeland. The First Ministers did not include the immigrants, the multiculturals, as part of the fundamental characteristic of Canada and there was another very serious and grave omission, the aboriginal people.