

Elimination of Racial Discrimination

I can speak with authority and personal experience when I say that many of our most recent citizens made their commitment to Canada, as well, on the grounds of the official public policy and the commitment of succeeding Governments to the concept of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism. I also speak with authority and experience when I say that these commitments are often betrayed and the expectations many of us brought to Canada, together with our industry and resources, were disappointed.

The Minister's statement was prompted by the United Nations proclamation dating back to 1966 which set aside this day as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This Government now feels that the Accord that was reached in the process of patriating our Constitution and the lofty ideals that are now entrenched within our Constitution are sufficient to eliminate overnight all forms of discrimination on the grounds of race, religion and colour.

It is naive in the extreme for the Government to believe it to be possible to legislate the attitudes of its citizens. We shall never be a truly multicultural society that appreciates and respects the rights of all its citizens, including those of the visible minority, until multiculturalism is recognized in our schools, in our municipal and provincial institutions of government and by all departments and agencies of the federal Government, not just the seasonally adjusted Department of Multiculturalism for which the Minister is responsible.

If the Government is serious about removing the barriers which prevent all Canadians from participating fully in the mainstream of life in our country, and if the Government is serious about progressing toward total elimination of discrimination on the grounds of race, religion and colour, it should consider the advisability of relieving the Minister of a responsibility which has traditionally been exercised purely in political terms and shifting such responsibility to a commissioner of multiculturalism who, like our Human Rights Commissioner, would ensure that all departments and agencies of the Government are held to the Government's commitment and, indeed, that the inducements necessary to ensure that the policy is understood and respected by private institutions as well are provided.

In the future, it will not be good enough for the Government merely to make available a few million dollars to cater to the various ethnic newspapers in the form of advertising Government programs in the different languages or to hold conferences of the type to which the Minister has alluded. If Canada is truly to be a multicultural community and if the Government is to take its Constitutional Accord seriously, we have to progress from the talking stage to a program of action. We will have to invite Canadians to share with us our compassion and understanding for those who live among us and find it difficult, initially at least, to assimilate to those aspects of Canadian life which are dissimilar to their own culture and religion. We will have to invite Canadians to discover the riches contained in the multicultural framework instead of the diversity.

This goal will not be achieved through meaningless discussion but through deliberate action aimed at bringing about a

better understanding among all Canadians, and through public policies which are to be implemented over time, not through intimidation or coercion, but through the creation of a public spirit shared by everyone, one that will assure us that no reasonable person is left out. Only then can we travel around the world proclaiming the United Nations principles to which we are committed with a clear conscience and with our heads held high.

Mr. Laverne Lewycky (Dauphin): Madam Speaker, it is indeed a great privilege to rise on the occasion of the Minister's statement with regard to the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. I am delighted that the Government is taking the opportunity to make use of ministerial statements. I only wish some of the other Ministers would take advantage of the opportunity so that we could respond and ask questions on these occasions.

I also wish to thank the Minister for providing me with an advance copy of his statement so that we may know what policies on multiculturalism the Government is proposing.

The Minister stated that Section 27 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms discusses the enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians. It is my hope that the Minister will use his good offices to ensure that a similar provision is included in the amendments to the Official Languages Act so that that document will also reflect the multicultural heritage that we have as Canadians.

I suspect that if the Minister had more time to make his statement he would also have mentioned that Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms dealing with equality rights also states that there shall not be discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age and so on.

I believe it is important for us to raise the profile of multiculturalism. I believe that many people have not understood multiculturalism. Some of those people may be scholars who have written books such as "The Vertical Mosaic" and who have considered that perhaps there is no place for multiculturalism in an egalitarian society which is concerned with individual merit and upward mobility. However, in the process they have failed to realize that there are group or collective rights in Canada. We have a policy in Canada which is different from that in the United States or any other country which has a "melting pot" policy.

I would like to illustrate what I mean when we talk about Canada being multicultural rather than a melting pot society. I am reminded of an article written by Palmer in 1973 in which he describes a graduation exercise in the Ford Motor Company where English was being taught. At that time there were some 500 graduates from this particular English class. They marched off a large immigrant ship and passed into a gigantic melting pot. As they came off the ship, they were dressed in their national costumes. The teachers stirred the pot and, as the graduates came out of this melting pot, they were waving American flags and wearing the American clothes of that particular era.