

Multiculturalism

We also cannot take solace in the refusal by the former Minister of Multiculturalism to get involved in a very direct and practical way in the racism which is currently going on in the taxi industry, not only in Montreal but in Toronto and Hamilton. We must look also at the absence of movement on the recommendations in Equality Now and the Abella Commission report. The Equality Now report, it was agreed by all three political Parties, was received with great enthusiasm out in the communities which are still wondering what happened to the many recommendations which have not been implemented.

We also have a lack of concrete results from the First Ministers' Conference on Multiculturalism. Every question I asked in this House of the then Minister of Multiculturalism was answered by saying that this conference was to be the answer to many of the problems. Yet we saw a two-page memorandum which said absolutely nothing. It gave us platitudes but in terms of concrete results, co-operation and eliminating duplication, there were no results. It was a closed door policy as well. It was a conference which was completely void of any input from the communities which that conference was supposed to be addressing. If there was any genuine interest in having a relevant agenda, then there should have been some dialogue with the communities at hand and that was not the case.

We can also look at the recent shuffle. This is not to be meant as a slight against the new Minister, by any means, because he did not make the decision. I feel we are going backwards, to the year 1979 when the former Government of Joe Clark appointed a Minister to be responsible for multiculturalism as well as an additional ministry. If we are talking about political will and a genuine desire to place multiculturalism on a solid footing, I would submit to you, with all due respect, that that is not the road to go. A caucus of 212 members have a lot of able men and women to perhaps dedicate themselves on a full-time basis to a multicultural program without taking the time and energies away from another portfolio. When I talk of political will, I talk of these and other movements we have seen in the last year.

Of course, we cannot overlook the handling of the Japanese-Canadian redress issue. Once again there were tremendous expectations on behalf of the Japanese-Canadian community based on the promises and utterings of the Prime Minister during the last election campaign. He promised that a solution would be forthcoming. Yet we see we are still in a log jam. The community has not been given a genuine opportunity to make proper representations at the proper time. It is fine indeed to talk about reforms and modifications but we also need the political will to make those recommendations viable.

We do not have to stop at the recommendations in this motion which have been already undertaken in the sense of a new committee and in terms of the separate Department. We can also talk about other structures. We can perhaps have a Parliamentary Secretary to the new Minister of State for Multiculturalism. For the last year that Minister was one of the new Ministers without a Parliamentary Secretary. I do not

know if things have changed with the new Minister but certainly it would be a welcome addition. Whenever the former Minister was absent in order to fulfil his legitimate responsibilities across the country, we in the Opposition were not able to get an answer from a person who spoke with any sense of authority or in any specific detail. I think perhaps we can start there as a way of reforming these structures as well.

We can look at the Canadian Multicultural Council and make reforms there as well because initially there were a number of ethnocultural communities which complained they were not represented. Specifically the German Canadian and Spanish Canadian communities did not have a representative on that council and that was a problem. There was also the problem that a number of people who were appointed to that 60-person committee did not have their roots in these communities so there were complaints from these various communities that in fact the representative who was supposed to be speaking for them were unknown. Therefore, I ask myself what use there was in having an advisory committee to the Minister when members of that Committee do not have their grass roots in the communities they are supposed to represent. Why should the Advisory Council only recommend and speak to the Minister directly? Why can it not come to this new committee on multiculturalism and exchange information with Parliamentarians and representatives of communities alike? Why should it only speak to the Minister rather than report back to Parliament directly?

We can talk about a Cabinet committee on multiculturalism. We all know that the major decisions of the day are made by Cabinet and specifically by the Planning and Priorities Committee. We all know that both the former and present Minister of State for Multiculturalism do not belong to that committee. That is not a slight against them, but if we are serious about this we can have a special or separate Cabinet committee to deal with multiculturalism so that aims and objectives of this policy can be put in front of the major decision-makers in Government on a day-to-day basis. We can go a long way toward improving the appointment procedure as I indicated earlier. We can look at the international scene and say why can the Canadian Government not make more use of the natural resource which many Canadians possess, namely a key to the language and culture of the various countries we do business with? Why not employ some of these Canadians in our trade missions abroad, our consulates and our embassies? These, too, are reforms or perhaps modifications to structures which can aid, enhance and strengthen an active and vibrant and bold multiculturalism policy, in addition to the changes announced by the Hon. Member for Thunder Bay-Nipigon.

● (1800)

My point is this. We can have changes in structures, yes. These will be improvements, yes. But if we do not have the political will to make the required changes, then those structures are rendered useless. I look forward to hearing from the Government side on how they would approach this issue.