

Multiculturalism
GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY S.O. 58—ALLEGED LACK OF
GOVERNMENT'S RECOGNITION OF MULTICULTURAL
NATURE OF CANADA

Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca) moved:

That this House, re-affirming that generations of peoples of diverse races and many nationalities have joined in peace and war to build a free Canada and to mold a Canadian nationality, regrets the government's reluctant and token recognition of this reality.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased with the opportunity to use one of our opposition days to discuss the question of multiculturalism. The diversity of origins, customs, religions, languages, literature, music and the arts is a precious Canadian asset. Retention and enhancement of these contributions to our society should be given every reasonable assistance, and where assistance involves the use of public funds it is incumbent upon the government to insure that there is no suggestion that such funds are being used to gain political favour.

To date, steps taken to implement a multicultural policy in this country have not convinced many Canadians that the aim has not been in some ways partisan. The program so far has been almost exclusively related to a few grants for this and for that; throw in a four-page ad which has the distinct appearance of election campaign material, and one could easily become suspicious of the motives. I am not being critical of the idea of grants, but it is clear that in order to realize the aims of a policy of multiculturalism much more than a few government handouts is necessary. There has to be a genuine effort to introduce appropriate legislative changes designed to give complete equality to all ethnic groups in the country.

We recognize that you cannot buy or legislate cultural activity or harmony. The government's cultural role has to be a supportive one to create the proper atmosphere and institutional basis to allow the realization by all Canadians of their cultural aspirations, and conditions must be such that these aspirations could emanate from the people, not from the state.

● (1520)

Multiculturalism is a uniquely Canadian concept and represents the traditional difference between the American melting pot and Canadian mosaic. This mosaic probably remains the single most important strand in the fabric of our national identity. Inside the melting pot everyone is rootless, floating like driftwood in the ocean, no roots to attach it to firm soil. Here in Canada, the English, the French and other Canadians of European origin, the Indians, are maintaining their identity and therefore maintaining their roots on Canadian soil. These groups occupy a special place in the unofficial agreement between people of various backgrounds living together, recognizing and appreciating each other's differences and respecting these while maintaining their own particular identities.

The original "B and B" concept failed to recognize this Canadian reality and in fact implied a quiet suppression of non-official cultures and languages, creating a feeling

[Mr. Gillespie.]

not conducive to unity in the country. Acceptance of and recognition of Canada's multicultural reality gives official status to the positive value of the contribution of other cultures to the Canadian cultural framework. In short, Canada's basic fibre consists of many groups, each of which has a rich and cohesive internal life, each of which has a desire to reach outward, to co-operate with, and appreciate the others.

Official recognition of this Canadian multicultural reality is a new thing for many Canadians. Many Canadians have greeted this recognition with joy, while others have greeted it with some suspicion. There have been feelings expressed that in some way an official policy of multiculturalism will detract from, or undermine, Canada's two largest ethnic groups, namely the English and French.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that I do not see multiculturalism in that kind of light. Multiculturalism simply adds to the richness contributed to this country by the two largest ethnic groups.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yewchuk: It is an embellishment and refinement of the definition of Canadian society as it actually exists. I would like to assure those who feel threatened that multiculturalism is not a threat to anyone. As I mentioned previously, official recognition of multiculturalism was generally accepted as a step in the right direction. As far as the non-official language groups are concerned, the policy was nearly universally received with some pleasure.

The minister's announcements of a few days ago concerning the establishment of an advisory council and the plan to hold a national conference on multiculturalism, as well as the various grants, are also small steps in the right direction but none of these things are satisfactory from the point of view of creating a feeling of complete equality amongst all Canadians. Mr. Speaker, there is a growing feeling amongst the ethnic groups that steps so far taken cannot be interpreted as much more than tokenism.

Many of the recommendations of the fourth book of the B and B Commission are left unattended, and many moves that could be made to achieve a better sense of belonging are yet to be made. There are certain legislative changes for example that could be carried out. First, a constitutional change would be in order which would officially embody the concept of multiculturalism within the Canadian constitution. This move is not something that would cost the taxpayer but would go a long way toward making all minority groups feel officially recognized and equal as Canadians.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yewchuk: The language bill could be improved as well by the strengthening of section 38, which deals with the rights of ethnic groups, in such a way as to make the section more positive. The purpose of such an amendment would be to ensure that the Official Languages Act does not have the effect, either directly or indirectly, of restricting in any way the current status or the future growth of any minority languages. Such an amendment could include guarantees of the right to speak a minority