

Private Members' Business

I want to note as well that we would by no means be the only jurisdiction to take this very, very small step because, after all, that is what it really is. The United Kingdom, for some time, has allowed all members of the police force of Sikh origin to wear the turban. In fact, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about tradition there are not many traditions longer than the tradition of the London bobby. Yet London police of Sikh origin are permitted to wear the turban and it has not resulted in any difficulties whatever.

The Canadian Armed Forces have changed their regulations to allow a turban which, again, is an appropriate colour and design, to be worn by members of the Canadian Armed Forces. Similarly, the metropolitan Toronto police force and the Edmonton police force have incorporated this important tradition, have incorporated this important element of religious faith, because it is not just a tradition.

I am very pleased that we have a number of representatives of the Sikh community in the House today. As has been pointed out by representatives of that community, any baptized Sikh would not be able to join the RCMP if he is not allowed to wear the turban. There should not be any fear that Sikhs will somehow destroy anyone's heritage, culture or beliefs. Sikhs simply want an opportunity to serve their country, our country, in the best possible manner while their religious faith is being respected. That is what this is all about and that is why it is so important that we take this opportunity this afternoon to send out that message.

I will conclude because I do want my colleagues to have an opportunity to speak on this question. In closing, I think it is important we recognize that we have an obligation to show leadership here. Parliament has an opportunity this Friday afternoon to send out a message of confidence in our country, a message that we celebrate the diversity of our country. We have an important opportunity to send the message to the Solicitor General who has waited far too long to come to a decision. Let us demonstrate leadership in this area.

I appeal to all members of the House this afternoon, those who might think of talking this motion out, to think twice, because those who would talk the motion out are going to have to explain, not just to Sikh Canadians, but to all Canadians why it is that they are not prepared to celebrate the diversity of this country and not prepared

to accept this very important recommendation of the commissioner. As the clock approaches three o'clock, we will be watching with great care to see if any member of this House actually insists on blocking this bill. For those who are not familiar with the procedure, if there is a debate continued at three o'clock that means there cannot be a vote of this House, that this House will not have an opportunity to speak.

So once again I appeal to all members of this House to let the House speak this afternoon on this important question. Let us take a decision. Let us accept this fundamental recommendation of tolerance and hope for all Canadians.

Mrs. Louise Feltham (Wild Rose): Mr. Speaker, the Member for Burnaby has presented the House with a question relating to proposed changes to the uniform of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The potential introduction of the turban as part of the red serge Mountie uniform has elicited a very strong reaction from many Canadians across the country, both for and against the idea.

Many of those who are arguing against change are adamant that their position is not reflective of a desire to exclude individuals of Sikh origin or, indeed, any member of a visible minority group from joining the force. Rather, they are interested in preserving the red serge uniform as a symbol of Canada's history and tradition.

The most common question being asked in western Canada is, why surrender our tradition for another tradition? It is common knowledge that the wearing of a turban in the Sikh society is based on tradition and custom and not on religious grounds. The obligatory tokens of the Sikh faith are the five Ks, the Kes, the Kara, the Kirpan, the Kanga and the Kachha. Whenever we read a newspaper or listen to a newscast these days, we hear more and more about our distinct society and the preservation of our Canadian culture. The unity of this country has even been challenged when reflecting cultural desires.

• (1420)

While Commissioner Inkster may have had good intentions, I think this proposal for change was for the worst possible reason. If you make an exception for one group of people, where do you stop? In order to come to a satisfactory resolution of this issue, I believe it is important to understand why some members of the