

Government Orders

Vancouver East moved a motion that would very clearly define what multiculturalism means in this legislation.

She suggests it means "that fundamental characteristic of Canadian society which recognizes the diversity and equality of all Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion."

Therein lies the challenge that we ought to have in terms of supporting the notion and concept of multiculturalism. But when we look at the record we see that that is not occurring. As a result of having supported this legislation at the second reading stage and after having seen how callously the government ignored the set of recommendations that came forward during the committee stage, naturally, we are having a great deal of reluctance now to continue that support. As a matter of fact, unless I hear some very encouraging remarks and total policy changes from the minister later on in this discussion, I am afraid that we will not be able to support this bill when it comes to the third reading stage.

Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to say a few words on this most important initiative.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I too am very happy to have the opportunity to speak on this important amendment. I salute the member for Vancouver East who tried for a long time to get a definition of multiculturalism into this bill. I think she has come up with one that is very good. It is one which we support.

Although we support this amendment, as the hon. member for Kamloops said, we do have some concerns with the activity of late in regard to this department, and I will come to them.

• (1540)

First, I would like to read the hon. member's definition of multiculturalism. In light of the constitutional debate that is going on today I think it is very important that when we talk about multiculturalism our definitions be very specific.

In her amendment the hon. member proposes that:

"multiculturalism" means that fundamental characteristic of Canadian society which recognizes the diversity and equality of all Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion.

It is so important that we have that definition because in the past the ministry of multiculturalism has been perceived as a service of government that was there for people from all cultures who required service, with the exception of English or French.

Initially, I supported this bill. Yet, as I said when I first spoke on it, it was with qualifications because I had some nervousness about it. I was nervous that the department might become a department which provides token activity.

What I am concerned about is that as this bill has been put through the various phases we have been seeing activity that has not been working in favour of its support. As I mentioned in my first speech, and I repeat it today, we are at a period of time when the Minister of Finance is always talking about national productivity and global competitiveness. I support that. But it seems to me that one of the distinct trading advantages that we have in this country is our multicultural reality.

I have had personal experiences myself in that regard. If we were in Japan dealing with Toyota, it was great to have someone along who could speak and understand the language. Last January, in Moscow, it was great to have someone there who could speak and understand Russian. When we can understand each other, that accelerates business opportunity. It promotes exchange between Canada and other countries around the world.

The thing that gave me great hope about this full department was that I could see that it would not be used just for cultural events, but that it would be used as an instrument to promote global economic activity, heritage languages and studies, as well as the institute, et cetera. Then, in the last few months, we have seen massive cutbacks.

What concerns me about the cutbacks to the proposed department of multiculturalism is the fact that when the Minister for International Trade wanted \$14 million to promote languages in the Pacific Rim he got it. Once again, I go back to my old nervousness which tells me that this department of multiculturalism is being treated in a way that is tokenism.

In other words, when the minister responsible for multiculturalism went to the cabinet table and said: "Here are my requirements," it seems that he really did not fare well. Obviously, every department had to be cut, but when a new department is just trying to get on its