

Multiculturalism. I say that I am pleased because we on this side of the House in parliamentary debates, through Standing Orders and in discussions with the former Minister, have been urging that a separate committee should be put in place by this fall. I am fully confident that this new committee will go a long way toward strengthening the role which multiculturalism should be playing in the country through Parliament Hill channels. I say that because all issues affecting multiculturalism used to flow through the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture. The problem with that was that a number of Ministers reported to it, namely, the Secretary of State, the Minister of Communications, as well as the Minister of State for Youth. What I found disconcerting was that multiculturalism was somehow placed on the last rung of the ladder by this committee. In fact, during the course of the last year there has been only one occasion when the Minister of State for Multiculturalism appeared before the committee.

A separate standing committee will certainly aid and enhance the regular dialogue, if you will, which will be taking place between the Minister, his officials and parliamentarians. It will also provide an opportunity to specifically focus on and specialize in a number of areas affecting multiculturalism. One example which comes to mind in this regard is the jam which we are presently in with respect to the Japanese Canadian redress issue. I think a separate committee will certainly go a long way in playing an active role in trying to establish a consensus and solution to this most urgent problem.

I think that politically it is a shot in the arm for multiculturalism in terms of the establishment of a separate standing committee. From a perception point of view, I think the committee places multiculturalism in the proper perspective. I think the committee will provide a vehicle for the Minister of State for Multiculturalism in carrying out his role within the House of Commons and within Cabinet.

Finally, with respect to the new committee, I think it is for the public at large since it will provide a permanent platform and resource for people from the ethnocultural communities and organizations, and Canadians in general, to come before the committee and communicate with their Minister and their parliamentarians the aspirations which they feel and the problems they see on a regular basis. I think that the new committee will be a welcome and powerful addition to the committee structure as we see it.

A separate, full-fledged Department would have similar and positive repercussions in the apparatus. First, I think we could be looking at improving the administrative infrastructure of multiculturalism. We are not necessarily talking in terms of spending a great deal of money with respect to implementing a new Department because, as it stands now, there are a number of programs and services closely associated with multiculturalism which exist in other Departments. When we speak of a full-fledged Department, we are trying to gather a number of roles and services which are presently being provided by other Departments under one roof.

On this specific point, I agree with my hon. friend that if we are to take the role of immigration and put it with multiculturalism,

then it would be a serious mistake. I say this not only because multiculturalism will again be second on the two-pronged ladder, but because it will fuel the perception that multiculturalism is only for new Canadians or immigrants. If that perception were allowed to travel from coast to coast then it would set multiculturalism back another decade. I believe that on a political level a separate Department speaks for itself. A separate Department and a separate deputy minister would certainly enhance the clout, the feasibility and viability of multiculturalism within the federal Government. I believe there is a danger in the motion before us if it is taken as a limited motion, in other words, if it is perceived by the Government that this is the only way to go to strengthen multiculturalism. I believe the present motion should not be seen as a substitute for political commitment. We should be looking at the political will of this present Government vis-à-vis multiculturalism. I believe that is the real thrust of the matter. That is the real heart of the issue and of the debate. If we are to look at the political will, that is different from looking at the structures or new structures which one may be implementing. I would respectfully submit that we can have all the structures, all of the changes and all of the reforms we like but if we have within those structures a lack of political will and encouragement, then those structures will not service.

● (1750)

When I speak of political will, I mean exactly that. Looking back over the last year with respect to multiculturalism, I for one cannot say that I am terribly heartened by the way in which this Government has dealt with multiculturalism. We could point to a number of issues, for instance, the reduction in the multiculturalism budget, as an example of political priority. At a time when expenditures were at least staying the same, multiculturalism suffered an 8.5 per cent reduction in financial support and resources. That to me does not put it on a level of priority as far as this Government is concerned notwithstanding the fact that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) back in June of 1984 at the Conservative Party Conference said, "We have seen millions of dollars spent on advertising and promoting our linguistic duality and a mere pittance directed to promoting our cultural diversity". Canadians from that comment, and others, assumed that multiculturalism occupied a greater priority in this Government. I believe it has not from a purely financial point of view.

We can look at the 46 specific multiculturalism promises which were made during the election campaign and then at the follow through and we must come to the conclusion that there are still 46 promises to be kept. We can look at the appointments of nearly 1,500 Canadians to various commissions, boards and committees. If we are to simply look at those appointments from the perspective of a balanced view of Canadians and their various cultures, we have to come to the conclusion that while there are a few appointees from Canada's so-called ethnocultural communities, certainly we are not pleased with the handful of appointments on a global sense considering the 1,500 appointments which were made.