

Multiculturalism

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister for being present here today. I am sure that by the various speeches made by the Official Opposition he has probably noticed that there are indeed longer-term goals in our society that we must be able to face. I believe that his job as Minister of Multiculturalism is indeed a very challenging one because he must cope with the ever-changing make-up of this country.

The debate we are having today is a very important one. We are not simply addressing Bill C-18, an Act to establish the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship, but are indeed speaking to the contemporary cultural reality that is Canada. More important, this debate will bring to the forefront some very fundamental questions related to the cultural policy direction that the country is willing to take to the 1990s and the 21st century.

During a period of our country's history when we are challenged by the definition of our cultural identity, it is very important to begin to review the role that multiculturalism plays in our society, indeed what necessitated the implementation of a Multiculturalism Act, what this Act is in fact responding to and, hence, what the purpose is of a separate Department. As a Canadian elected to the House of Commons, I firmly believe that I have the moral obligation to attempt to define what is Canadian culture, what is our Canadian identity.

In this nation we are often faced with a multitude of terms to define and express what is, in cultural terms, our Canadian society. Terms such as "bilingual", "multicultural", "diversity" and "pluralism" are but a few of the expressions that we have used in an attempt to come to grips with who we are and what we are. As far as I am concerned, I view our Canadian cultural reality in multicultural terms, however, not necessarily in total accordance with the traditional meaning of multiculturalism or its usage.

There is no question in my mind that contemporary Canadian culture is indeed multicultural. The very essence of this reality can be seen in the many faces of our Canadians citizens. I stress "Canadian" because if we were to examine the terminology used in the description of various Canadians of different heritages, for example, Japanese-Canadians, Chinese-Canadians, Greek-Canadians, Italian-Canadians, French-Canadians

and Portuguese-Canadians, we see that indeed the common point of reference, the focal point, is that they are Canadian. That is what brings all these people into a common fold. That is our common denominator.

In my past experiences I have noted that the multiculturalism policy was embracing all Canadians with the exception of the English, French and native components of our nation. That is indeed the national perception. I feel very strongly that if Canada's multiculturalism policy is to be a truly national policy, we must be able to safety state that it represents everyone. The present direction of the policy has resulted in a form of societal differentiation creating the community concept of English, French, natives and others; others being "multicultural".

• (1740)

Canadian culture is undoubtedly a sum of all parts. Multiculturalism is its essence.

I am very proud to be part of a Parliament whose objectives recognize and promote the understanding of multiculturalism, the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all Members to preserve, enhance and share in their cultural heritage.

I am very proud to be part of a nation which recognizes that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of Canadian heritage. How serious we are about this is questionable when we view for example, the Meech Lake Accord. Why was the multicultural characteristic of the country not in the preamble as were the English and French components?

We tend, if we look at the issue very, very closely, to become a bit cynical. In the spirit of optimism, we should perhaps look at ways to salvage the beauty of a truly multicultural society.

Multiculturalism *per se* can in fact provide and is, in fact, an invaluable resource in shaping Canada's future. A nation which promotes the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assists them in the elimination of any barriers to such participation should be applauded. We also ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity.