

Government Orders

That was what we found at second reading. If you were to look back at *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker, you would see that the speeches actually reflect that. There was a great deal of enthusiasm in the House—not quite unanimous, but virtually unanimous—in terms of what appeared to be the general thrust that the government was taking with regard to Bill C-18, in response, I might add, to some good, positive lobbying by the Canadian Ethnocultural Council.

After second reading the bill went to committee. At that time a whole set of concerns which were raised were simply not met. I hesitate to do so but perhaps it would be appropriate to refer to a letter that a number of members received not many weeks ago from the Canadian Ethnocultural Council.

The author of the letter points out that the council is very concerned with this piece of legislation. To use his words, “to accept a half-baked bill and department would be to ignore the trust of our membership in advocating for meaningful policy”. The letter was signed by Mr. Lewis Chan, the President of the Canadian Ethnocultural Council. This is an individual representing an organization, which in turn represents the ethnocultural fabric of the country, which is calling the legislation and the department half-baked.

I think it might be worthwhile to take a moment or two to explain why people are beginning to refer to the department in such a negative way before it is even created. This does not bode well for the future.

I can use my own constituency as an example. We have an immigrant services organization whose job it is to provide all sorts of supportive infrastructure for new Canadians. It bases its operations largely on volunteer work. This is a group of many Canadian citizens who are prepared to spend their talents, energy, time and, in some cases, their own money to assist new Canadians. They have had a paltry budget to operate a centre which provides a central focus for these people to come to participate in various programs. Yet their funding has been reduced at a time when we are seeing the numbers of people coming to Canada increase.

Money set aside for language training has also been reduced. This group is rather exasperated because people are trying to serve, if you like, the minister and the federal government in providing a welcome to new

Canadians, yet they are unable to do so at what you would have to call any reasonable level.

Just the other day I received a note from representatives of the Sikh community in Kamloops who were complaining about the fact that for a number of years they have been educating their young people in their own language. The funding has now been cut. The traditional programs that they were able to produce are no longer there. There was a great deal of anguish felt in that community because they are unable to provide this very important service, as they saw it, which would allow their community to maintain its cultural vibrancy in the community.

I think we all appreciate, particularly during these times, how important language is. If the language of a group dies, its ability to carry on in any meaningful cultural way is essentially eliminated, something which we have seen, much to our disappointment, with a number of native languages in our country. Hopefully, we are seeing a bit of a comeback in that regard.

It seems to me that if the government was really supportive of the concept of multiculturalism, then that is one of the areas of funding it would be expanding. Alas, such is not the case.

We have seen a 15 per cent cut to advocacy groups. I thought the point of this whole initiative was to encourage the multicultural diversity in the country. At a time like this one does not cut funding to the advocacy groups that represent these particular communities.

We have also seen that cuts were made to citizenship instruction and language training which was a cost-sharing agreement with the provinces to fund part-time ESL/FSL and citizenship training for immigrants.

I do not have to say that in this year's budget the funding for heritage languages was cut by over \$4 million. Essentially, this eliminated the subsidy for heritage language classes across the board.

I could go on at some length. I have all kinds of notes that various organizations have provided with respect to where the government has reduced, cut, curtailed and eliminated support for the various aspects of Canada's ethnocultural community.

That is why we are rather perplexed that we are proceeding with this particular piece of legislation at this time and in this way. That is why my hon. colleague from