

Private Members' Business

• (1710)

It also occasioned a significant delay in reuniting a family, where that was possible.

But we know that in many, or even most cases, the family was never reunited. Individuals who came to Canada, virtually all male, if they wanted to visit their spouses over a 10 or 20 year period, had to leave and go back to China where they would stay for a short period and then come back to Canada. Many of those died alone in Canada.

It also prevented marriage of these Chinese immigrants. In those days, intermarriage was frowned upon and there simply were not enough females to permit the Chinese population here to marry in a circumstance that the society existing here would have permitted.

The result then is that hundreds, perhaps thousands of new Canadians were basically forced to spend the rest of their years alone in Canada. They lost contact with family, spouse, children. Those men came and built our country and when they had finished that we left them standing at the side of the road. I say thank God some of them lived long enough to collect the old age pension, but that is really not much of a consolation prize.

Why did we do it? I suppose I do not really know. I can only guess. I was not there. Maybe some of us are afraid to ask. I think we should ask, because that is how we can learn from history. But no matter what the reason, it was wrong, and we know it was wrong.

Some say that we should not waste time and the resources of the present to go back and redress the wrongs of the past. If we really believe that, I ask the House why we are still prosecuting war crimes that took place between 1939 and 1945? Those acts did not even involve Canadians, for the most part, they did not take place on Canadian soil, and please keep in mind that the Chinese Exclusion Act was not repealed until 1947. Why also are we still redressing treaty and non-treaty rights of aboriginal Canadians? There are grievances involving acts that we did and did not do, omission and commission, 100 and 150 years ago in relation to native Canadians. We admit our responsibility for all of that. We are still dealing with it, maybe not quickly enough, but we are dealing with it.

I can accept that we do not have to go back and redress grievances that emanated from the Franco-Prussian War, or from the quasi-genocides that occurred when the Europeans first arrived in the New World 300, 400 years ago. But I do not think that is what we are dealing with here now. I do not accept that a living Canadian who has been wronged does not have the right to seek redress, or that his country does not have an obligation to respond to him or her.

Today, in the House, we have one of those thousands who paid the head tax, Mr. James Ng from Montreal. I heard him speak eloquently about the impact of that tax on his family and him. His father paid the tax, \$500, and spent years repaying it. Some years before his father had gone back to China, fathered Mr. Ng, and came back to Canada. Ten years later, Mr. Ng set out, at 10 years of age, and came to Canada alone. He spent two weeks in a rather cold detention centre where his family was forced to pay another fifty bucks to get him released. He calls that "under the table" money.

Yet, Mr. Ng expresses a pride in his country. He feels badly about the misfortunes of the Chinese immigrants of the time, and Lord knows there have been many immigrants from many countries who had terrible times and suffering. But Mr. Ng is proud of Canada. He believes, nonetheless, that Canada must respond to the wrong that that tax represented.

I want to add a note of caution. I do not believe that the government should let this issue drag on. I do not believe it should give time and opportunity to those who live with intolerance and manifest it, to manifest their intolerance again. I believe the government should act quickly to address the grievance and provide a redress. If it is the right thing to do, then we must do it now.

I urge all members in the House to support this motion.

Mrs. Pauline Browes (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State of Canada and Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Citizenship)): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to participate in this very important debate today. I want to express to the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River, whose riding and my own are side by side, that we share many of the sentiments that have been expressed in terms of this motion today.