

*Private Members' Business*

a government-funded program that pays people to, first, keep their native cultures and languages, and, second, that serves to divide the country. These myths have, to an extent, been further propagated following the release of Mr. Neil Bissoondath's recent book, entitled "Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism". Although I certainly welcome this interesting publication as a means of stimulating debate in this area, I must also state my reservation about the unsubstantiated assertions made therein.

Mr. Bissoondath has misread the effects of multiculturalism by insinuating that money spent on multicultural events will reinforce stereotypes and lead to a break-up of the country socially.

I find perplexing the assumption that, for example, the display of a community's traditional dance could lead to divisiveness and negative stereotyping. This conclusion clearly is not credible. We know that multiculturalism does not promote or reinforce negative stereotypes.

• (1840)

In reference to the dance, I and my family, as individuals and collectively, felt that we must preserve certain customs, traditions and beliefs. Based on those needs, because of our ethnic background, we preserved what we wanted, what we felt was honourable and desirable to preserve and pass on from generation to generation. One of those activities was Ukrainian dance. Everyone in my family learned how to do the Kolemka, the Hopokola, and other dances, which we all immensely enjoyed, not only with our members of the family but with other people in the community.

In these dances, there were not only those who were of Ukrainian ethnic background but of a multitude of ethnic backgrounds. That was the composition of the community in which I was raised. We all lived in perfect harmony with each other. No one decided that there should be a barrier between the Italians, the Germans, the Japanese, the Ukrainians or the Slovaks. We all had basically the same needs.

Moreover, Mr. Bissoondath draws a link between multiculturalism and the marginalization of immigrants. He relates the story of Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson, who, in a 24-hour period, was transformed in media sports from "the Canadian who had won Olympic gold through effort to the Jamaican immigrant who had lost it through use of drugs". It was from the positive to the negative, from the Canadian to the Jamaican immigrant. In my mind it is very clear that this type of media report is a result of ignorance and unconscious prejudice. It is certainly not a result of multiculturalism's assumed marginalizing effects.

The reality is that multiculturalism brings strength to this country. It is, however, a human characteristic to react in a

reflex-like and emotional manner when confronted with unsubstantiated stories about certain communities. We should not allow rumours and hearsay to determine our policies. Unfounded stories are not based upon educated opinion and most certainly are not based upon facts.

I expect that the Reform Party's position is the result of sloppy and inaccurate research because I certainly do not want to believe that they are intentionally misguiding the Canadian public. Not for one moment do I believe that they would do such a thing.

However, Mr. Neil Bissoondath in his book, when referring to the Reform Party's opposition to multiculturalism, indicates:

my attitude is at best suspicious. Reform strikes me as a party that suffers from an astounding lack of social generosity and counts among its membership too many who are either racially minded or, to coin a phrase, knowledge-challenged.

Multiculturalism was officially introduced into Parliament on October 8, 1971. It was expected to be a vehicle through which we would achieve a cultural mosaic, as opposed to the U.S. melting pot. Today, 42 per cent of Canadians have origins that are other than British or French. While people with European origins still make up the largest number of Canadians, more and more immigrants are coming to Canada from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

This is changing the face of the Canadian population. In the 1986 census, visible minorities accounted for 6.3 per cent of the Canadian population. By 1991 this figure was almost 10 per cent. The visible minority population of major cities is greater. For instance, in Toronto it is 26 per cent; Vancouver, 24 per cent; and in Montreal, 11 per cent.

Canada's multiculturalism policy is one expression of leadership. The multiculturalism policy is rooted in Canadian values. It is consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which establishes the fundamental freedoms and democratic rights of all individual Canadians, irrespective of national or ethnic origin. It is also consistent with the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Official Languages Act and the Citizenship Act.

• (1845)

Multiculturalism, as described under federal policy, is concerned with helping people become full participants in the life of Canada. It is certainly not concerned with the mandatory retention of culture and does not encourage cultural isolation, as some critics erroneously charge. There are the so-called ghettos of our communities where we may find, as we find in Thunder Bay, a large gathering of a certain group of people with a specific ethnic background. We find this happening because they choose to be neighbours. They choose based on their every day needs to be in constant contact with each other, to help each other, until they reach the point where they can communicate with anyone in their neighbourhood in the common language of