

*Private Members' Business*

This minister has abdicated his responsibility and his leadership in this very important area. In fact, I would have to ask with whom is the minister consulting? We know that he is a part-time minister, that he is also responsible for agriculture and that he has political responsibilities in the Quebec area. How much longer must we wait before leadership is shown in this important area? Why is it that despite repeated requests by the Federation of Sikh Societies to meet with the Minister to discuss this important question, he has refused to meet with these representatives?

I have a letter dated June 19 which was sent by Mr. Mohinder Singh Gosal, the President of the Federation of Sikh Societies of Canada, urging that they be given an opportunity to meet with the minister to discuss this question. Despite repeated attempts, the minister has refused to do so.

Who is the minister listening to? With whom is he consulting? It seems, because of the delay, that perhaps he is listening to the voices of some of his colleagues in the Conservative caucus, what I would call the dinosaur wing of the Conservative caucus, certain Alberta members of Parliament; the member for Wild Rose and the member for Calgary Southwest, who have suggested that this very important recommendation by the Commissioner of the RCMP should not in fact be implemented.

I know that there is division, discontent and confusion on that side of the House, but today we have an opportunity to send out a very clear message as a Parliament to the people of Canada who are watching this debate, not just the Sikh community, but all Canadians, as to our view. Will it be the view of the member for Wild Rose and the member for Calgary Southwest? The member for Wildrose is quoted as saying that "in western Canada the RCMP mean a lot to us", and they do of course, "and the uniform does. I want to keep it as it is." She went on to say: "Something must be done if we are to keep it forever as it is now".

Let us look at the history of the RCMP uniform. The Northwest Mounted Police were founded in 1873. If we are to look at the traditions that the hon. member has spoken of, the tradition was a pillbox. Does the hon. member want to go back to the days of the pillbox? It was in 1900 that the stetson was brought in at the urging of prairie members of the RCMP because of concerns about the sun.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, back in 1873 and 1900, there were not too many members of the RCMP who wore skirts, nylons and high heels, at least not on duty. The reality is that the RCMP has changed with the times.

I would have hoped that the minister responsible for multiculturalism might have drawn to the attention of the Solicitor General the fact that the changes have been made. Instead, the minister responsible for multiculturalism has been silent while some of his Conservative colleagues have been fanning the flames of hostility and intolerance. That is shameful.

I suggest that we have again an opportunity in this session this afternoon to speak out and voice our concern about this kind of attitude. It is an attitude which has unquestionably led to a rise in the incidence of violence, hatred, and intolerance directed at the Sikh community, particularly in Alberta, where those members are fanning these flames.

Another Conservative member of Parliament, the member for Calgary North, has said that the tabling of these petitions has given rise to unfortunate incidences of prejudice and racism in Calgary. Ron Chahal of Calgary, the president of the World Sikh Organization, has said the frequency of obscene gestures directed at Sikh motorists by other drivers has gone up. That is the kind of atmosphere which is being promoted, whether deliberately or otherwise, by the attitudes of the hon. members.

We have seen shameful badges which have the head of a Sikh in a turban and say "ban this". That kind of badge has no place in a civilized society, and certainly no place in Canada.

I have asked why the minister responsible for multiculturalism has been silent. Understandably, the Sikh community is raising concerns in a more general sense as well. They are asking if perhaps this is part of a more general lack of understanding and concern about issues affecting this proud community, a community which has contributed so much to our society.

For example, there are deep concerns about the way in which the Air-India disaster has been dealt with and the fact that we are still waiting for a comprehensive inquiry into that terrible disaster which resulted in the loss of 329 lives and which also resulted in the blackening of the reputation of an entire community by certain unforgivable actions of CSIS and others.