

Private Members' Business

I could go on, but I think I should point out in support of this matter that a large number of western Canadians of Chinese origin are entrepreneurs and professionals. A majority of them work in sales, services, and other white collar work. Most of them think of themselves as Canadians first and Chinese second. But—and this is important—alone among all cultural groups in Canada they know that their families were forced to pay an entry fee and were effectively barred from immigration from 1923 to 1947. It goes on:

Attitudes have finally changed throughout Canada and institutionalized racism is gone. No longer do whites expect them or anyone to be "assimilated." They can now preserve and celebrate their cultural identity and remain both Canadian and Chinese in whatever proportion they choose.

I hope it follows from what I have just said that this is a motion that deserves to be passed, not to be talked out today by government members.

I would point out to the parliamentary secretary who spoke a few minutes ago that the recent budget, I understand, gives either \$12 million or \$14 million to Canadian businessmen to learn Pacific Rim languages. The same budget cuts, I think it is \$4 million, from heritage language programs across Canada, every penny of those programs.

In other words there is money for things that it wants, but there does not seem to be money from this government until the next election for causes which are just and have been a canker on the Canadian soul for many years.

I would hope that the government members will not get up one after another now and attempt to talk this excellent motion out.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Bob Porter (Medicine Hat): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to respond to my hon. colleague's motion with respect to the head tax levied on immigrants from China from the period 1885 to 1923.

The head tax of 1885 and the subsequent Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 were, in their times, culminations of the prevalent fear of Chinese immigrants. The range of racist and discriminatory measures to which the Chinese historically were subjected in this country is astonishing to this generation.

We live in another era. My hon. colleagues have underscored the fact that the government measures encouraged the growth and development of a spirit of respect and equality. Canada was an original signator on the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, of the United Nations international convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, as well as the enactment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and its equality provisions.

Canadians of all cultural backgrounds benefit from a positive framework to combat racial discrimination. For example, we have the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and the employment equity legislation, including measures with respect to the representation of visible minorities in the Public Service.

My hon. colleagues have spoken of other programs and educational efforts that the government has undertaken to remove the stain of racism from all sectors of Canadian society; in education, the media, the workplace, business, health and social services, and public administration at all levels of government. The government's tabling of Bill C-63 which establishes the Canadian Race Relations Foundation demonstrates its commitment to the elimination of racism.

All these measures ensure a characteristic of our society that is so evident and of which we are so proud. Canada is a multicultural country and Canadians of Chinese origin or ancestry are an important part of this multicultural identity.

In 1947, the Chinese Immigration Act was finally repealed. By 1967, remaining vestiges of immigration discrimination against the Chinese were finally and completely removed. These landmarks did not occur by accident. They resulted from the struggle and determination of generations of Chinese Canadians and, eventually, from the majority of Canadians who could no longer condone such discrimination.

This struggle began almost from the very beginning of the Chinese community in Canada when Chinese Canadians, as was mentioned earlier, helped to build the national railway, under the most appalling conditions. Chinese Canadians were building the country during the early years of Confederation. They remain at the task today, joined with other Canadians in the process of building Canada.