

*Private Members' Business*

ation would have to be accorded to all requests for concessions no matter how valid.

These are important concerns. I do not believe that those who are against changes to the RCMP red serge uniform are against the idea of Sikhs or a member of any minority group joining the force. Quite the contrary. The focus of these arguments is the notion that no matter what a person's ethnic or religious background may be, if that individual wishes to become a member of the RCMP, he or she should accept the established dress code. In other words, membership may have its privileges, but it also entails certain obligations.

In so far as the RCMP uniform is concerned, the view is that we are not dealing with just any uniform but the uniform of Canada's national police force. The significance of the scarlet tunic for those who view the uniform as a symbol of Canada's history and traditions cannot be underestimated.

**Mrs. Edna Anderson (Simcoe Centre):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Burnaby—Kingsway has presented for the consideration of this House the issue of the proposed changes to the uniform of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police which would allow members of Sikh origin to wear turbans.

Given the diverse and intense reaction to this proposal, it is clear that this is not a simple cosmetic variation to a police uniform. The issue of modifying the RCMP uniform to allow turbans is a complex one, because it serves to bring into play our respect for Canada's unique history and tradition, and the desire to welcome into the society as full participating members individuals of various ethnic origins.

For this reason, I would like to examine the different points of view expressed in regard to this issue in order to better assess what the proposed changes represent to Canadians. It is imperative that a workable solution be found to this question through serious study and consultation.

Some members of the public have expressed their strong opposition to the introduction of the turban as part of the RCMP uniform. This issue has clearly struck a deep nerve across the country. The gist of many of the opinions expressed centres on the view that the red serge uniform has evolved over the more than 100-year history of the RCMP into a national symbol, one that is instantly

recognized across Canada and indeed throughout the world. And, of course, Canadians have every reason to be proud of the outstanding reputation the force has earned over the years both at home and abroad.

Thus arguments have been advanced that modifying the red serge uniform to accommodate turbans in lieu of the stetson hat would not accord with the traditional image of Canada that many Canadians associate with the Mounties.

• (1450 )

Furthermore, it has been contended that introducing this variation would make it more difficult for new members wearing turbans to be assimilated into the police organization both from the point of view of the public and of other RCMP members. If the purpose of any uniform is to identify its wearers as being part of a distinct organization and to create an *esprit de corps*, at what point does allowing variations to accommodate new members counter the purpose of the uniform as a unifying force?

These are all valid concerns which deserve serious reflection. I do not believe they are directed against the Sikh community or any religious group but are simply indicative of a sincerely expressed desire to maintain a long standing symbol of Canada. Indeed, from the perspective of native Canadians, the preponderant majority of us sitting here today is descendant of immigrants to this country. Multiculturalism is a fact of life in Canada and has been since its inception. The RCMP is made up of Canadians. Their roots represent many cultures and religions. All have been proud to wear the traditional RCMP uniform.

Canada has always welcomed immigrants to her shores. I realize that we have benefited from the contributions of many countries and many cultures. However, in the past Canadian traditions, laws and institutions have been adopted, upheld and strengthened by the people seeking to make their home in Canada. Everyone has always been welcomed and everyone will still be welcomed.

In Canada, people are free to practice their religion and keep their customs. People can make choices about how they choose to live their lives. The face of Canadian society is changing and there is a line of thought that so