

*Private Members' Business*

He said: Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity today to rise in the House to address a motion asking this government to redress the wrongs associated with a statute that has been called the Chinese Immigration Act, sometimes called the Chinese Head Tax, and sometimes called the Chinese Exclusion Act.

I am asking the government to redress these wrongs on behalf of all Canadians, not just some of them, on behalf of those who paid the tax as well, and all of those just happen to be of Chinese origin.

Specifically, my motion calls upon the government to reimburse all of the payers of the tax and to acknowledge that the requirement to pay the tax was wrong and that it was discriminatory.

In particular, my motion calls for reimbursement of those individual payers who were alive on election day, November, 1988. That is the day that I was elected to the House of Commons. It was the day that others who spoke publicly or who wrote publicly on that issue were elected to the House. It was an issue that was dealt with and treated during the election campaign.

However, I have to point out that the specifics of reimbursement framed in my resolution are not of chief importance. What is important is that the government consult, that it negotiate and that it respond.

Who are the politicians who spoke to the issue? Who were those in our community who wrote about it, spoke about it and in fact made commitments? Most of the politicians are actually on record. Two of them that I have noted are the Prime Minister, and the former Leader of the Opposition. But there are others, many others, who include individuals and groups from a broad cross-section of Canadian society.

They include the Canadian Council of Churches, Mr. Georges Erasmus of the Assembly of First Nations, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National President of Rail Canada Traffic Controllers, the President of the Canadian Auto Workers, United Steel Workers Local 6, and the President of the Quebec Human Rights Association.

What exactly was the law that levied the tax? The first Chinese came to Canada in about 1858. About 20 years later in 1880 thousands of Chinese came to Canada to

build the railroad. We have plenty of pictures, books, documentaries. All of that is on record. These railroad builders were pioneers; they were our pioneers. Their national dream was our national dream; ours was theirs.

At one time their goals were characterized by the phrase the "Golden Mountain". I understand that is what they thought of Canada as being in those years before they got here, before they saw what Canada was really like. That is why they came. They came along with all of the other immigrants to Canada, my forefathers, to build the railroad and to build our country.

In about 1885 our railroad was completed and suddenly we did not need any more Chinese. We just did not need the Chinese labour, but we needed Europeans and Americans. I guess it was decided to levy a tax specifically on Chinese immigrants. Eventually, the amount of that tax reached \$500 per person.

No other group or race was similarly taxed. In fact, history shows that we gave bonuses to immigrants from Europe and settlers from other places. The tax imposed on immigration was patently discriminatory and based on race.

In 1923 it appeared that the \$500 per head tax just was not good enough. So the government, in its wisdom, decided to exclude all Chinese. In those days, the government did not seem to be able to distinguish between Chinese origin, Chinese language, Chinese race; it simply used the name "Chinese". The Chinese were excluded so much so that between 1923 and 1947 fewer than 50 "Chinese" were given papers for admission to Canada.

What was the impact of this law on the Chinese Canadian community, as it was then? In a nutshell, it was devastating in the end result.

In the initial instance, it took from the pocket of an immigrant an amount that would have been the equivalent of one or two year's wages, and I guess that was before there was income tax. That was a lot of money for an immigrant. It prevented an immigrant from purchasing land, setting up a business, building a home, creating a stake in his new country. Chinese Canadians of that era were basically prevented from settling into the economy because when they got here they had huge debts amounting to one or two year's wages. That is on the assumption that they did not have the \$500 when they came.