

Government Orders

There are members in this House who were born in Africa, in Asia and in Europe. This Parliament, and this country, one of the very few countries in the world is where we have this opportunity, privilege and this honour. It is a privilege and an honour for me, a person who was not born in this country, to be elected to represent my fellow citizens and fellow Canadians in this, the Parliament of Canada.

This is our strength as a country. This is the strength of our society. Yet, what we find in this government is a downsizing, a downgrading and the dismantling of things that have built Canada and made it strong. We see the dismantling of VIA Rail, we see the dismantling and the destruction of our cultural institutions like the CBC and the Canada Council. We see the destruction and the dismantling of Canada by the cut-backs to regional economic development, as well as by cut-backs of these great Canadian institutions in what we have in front of us today, the cut-backs to this important department and program, multiculturalism.

We see that our goals as a country are being diminished, downsized and downgraded. I ask this government: What are you going to leave us? What is your vision of Canada? What in heaven's name are you doing to our Canada? You are dismantling it, you are destroying it. What in heaven's name are you going to replace it with? What is going to be left when you are finished? Are we, indeed, going to have a country? What is going to happen to the rich resources, the human resources that we have built up over the years?

• (1610)

Bill C-18 could have been an important piece of legislation that all members of this House wanted to participate in and help strengthen because we recognize it is so important to our country. Yet, unfortunately, the attitude of the parliamentary secretary as he represented the government's attitude today is one of non-co-operation and in this I find it sad and unfortunate. I do hope that other government members will not heed the official line of the government and that they will vote with us on these important amendments.

[Translation]

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to take part in this important debate this afternoon. First of all, I wish to say that I also support Motion No. 1 which defines multiculturalism. In different circumstances, perhaps I would have consid-

ered what the parliamentary secretary said earlier. However, after giving the matter some thought and if we consider the government's record in this respect, I think we must insist on having a definition of multiculturalism. When the government introduced the bill to establish the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship, I was delighted because at last there was some recognition of the facts. In Canada today, there is no majority. One could say we are all equal, in the sense that one-third of our citizens are English in background, one-third French and another third have other cultural backgrounds.

So there is not one single cultural group that could be said to have a majority. When this Department was established, I thought we were finally giving recognition to those millions of Canadians who have made a major contribution to this country. Today, however, I am not so sure. I have the impression that the government merely wants to establish this department so that it can say during the next election campaign—I speak for the Montreal area. I come from that area, and we know how the government tries to make people believe it is aware of the problems of our cultural communities and that it is doing something about them. However, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the facts, this new department will be just another “monument”, just so they can say: We have established a department of multiculturalism, just as they bragged during the last election campaign that they had finally drafted legislation on multiculturalism. When we read the legislation, it contained no specifics, nothing concrete at all. Sure, the government may, if it wants to, but there was nothing specific. The government must do that, the government should do that. It was always conditional, Mr. Speaker, and I see that nothing has changed.

If we look at this issue, the parliamentary secretary says that multiculturalism is defined in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. However, when the Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Citizenship) had to make cuts in his budget, why were programs to assist heritage language teaching the first items to be cut? How can we say we want to promote multiculturalism in Canada when the first thing the government does is withdraw the help that is needed to teach heritage languages? That is the very basis of multiculturalism. How can we say our children are maintaining their cultural heritage, the culture of their parents, if they cannot learn the language of that culture? That is important. It is the very