

Multiculturalism

ment to spend as much as it takes to train new-comers, immigrants, in both or either of the official languages. It is a shame, particularly when we talk about English or French training for our immigrants and new Canadians, that it is largely the visible minority women that are left behind in terms of the language training deficiency. A lot of times, unfortunately, it is the major bread-winner, and in some groups it happens to be the male, who has access to language training facilities. The children through the process of going to school and the dynamics of playing with their friends learn one of the two official languages. However, quite often it is the woman who is left behind, whether at home or with poor economic opportunities without any hope for vertical mobility because of language deficiencies.

It is time that we grew up in this country to realize one thing, that whether it costs x millions or y millions to provide language in either English or French, it is money well spent. We cannot put a value on what it means when people are having difficulties in communicating with one another within Canadian society. It would help everyone's sense of Canadianism if we attached the proper financial investment. We would reap benefits that far outstrip the value of the dollars that we would put at the beginning of the equation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Since there are no further questions, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North on debate.

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak on Bill C-18, an Act to establish the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship and to amend certain Acts in relation thereto. Multiculturalism is an idea that we are still striving to fully achieve in Canada involving as it does the official recognition of the different cultures and the values of a pluralistic society that accompany them. Multiculturalism does ask to enshrine the principles that all our ethnic groups, that is, all Canadians are equal, that all of our cultures deserve respect and dignity and that cultural pluralism must receive official support.

The establishment of a Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship is an important step in the right direction and an essential instrument of national unity. A separate Department for Multiculturalism and Citizenship is necessary to ensure that these two areas are

not neglected or ignored as they would be if included in a super ministry.

I must point out however that there are problems with Bill C-18 which are a cause of concern. Perhaps some of the concerns will be addressed when the Bill reaches the legislative committee.

First, there is no provision in the Bill that states that the new department will be responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. It is not enough that the Bill includes general statements about the policy of multiculturalism. It should be clearly stated that the new department will be responsible for implementing the Multiculturalism Act.

Second, there is no provision for an independent commissioner of multiculturalism and therefore the effectiveness of the department will be limited. An independent commissioner, as called for by the Standing Committee on Multiculturalism in 1987, is necessary because such a commissioner would be able to monitor the Act across the Government without—and I emphasize “without”—political interference. Not only would an independent commissioner monitor multiculturalism in all departments—Justice, Immigration and Employment, to name a few—but the commissioner would also be able to initiate and carry out investigations into the implementation of programs and delivery of services by various departments.

A commissioner would be a non-partisan watchdog who would be especially effective in protecting the values of multiculturalism and citizenship in all governmental departments in ensuring compliance with the Act.

The Minister in introducing the debate on this Bill has indicated that a Standing Parliamentary Committee will be struck this fall. I believe in his sincerity and we anticipate that at least we have that second best.

It is not merely these two very specific problems with Bill C-18 which worry me. I am concerned about this Government's approach to multiculturalism in general. On the one hand, the Conservative Government has introduced this Bill to create a Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship. On the other hand, the Government has cut funding for operational support to the very groups that the Department is being established to represent and protect. To me, this is a contradiction in policy, or is it the Government's philosophy? This contradiction in policy demonstrates this Government's