

A few minutes ago I asked the member for New Westminster—Burnaby some direct questions in terms of whether she considered herself part of the multicultural community and whether multicultural to her meant everybody, regardless of their ethnic origin.

I know my colleague, the member from the Arctic, felt slighted when this government entered into the Meech Lake Accord. One of the reasons she felt slighted and aboriginal people generally felt slighted was that when the Prime Minister and ten First Ministers got together at Meech Lake, one of their purposes was to define Canada in the Constitution. They started to talk about fundamental characteristics of Canada. We know that the main thrust of the Meech Lake discussion was to get Quebec's signature to the Constitution, but in so doing it was necessary for them to define Canada as it is today.

I think it would be useful to try to recall how they defined Canada. They said that English speaking Canadians and French speaking Canadians are fundamental characteristics of Canada, period, full stop. My mother, an immigrant to this country, does not speak fluent French—in fact, she does not speak any French at all—and she does not speak fluent English. So by implication in this particular Meech Lake Accord my mother and the hundreds of thousands of others like her are not fundamental characteristics of Canada.

By implication as well—and the member finished her speech by referring to the fact that she considers herself Canadian first and first Canadian—when the powers that be came together to try to define Canadian culture in Canada they excluded not only people of origins other than French or English; they also excluded the aboriginal people, those who were here first. When I speak of the mindset, the discriminatory not necessarily intentional mindset in Canada, one has to look at things like the Meech Lake Accord and one has to examine the actions of the government with for example—and I mentioned this the other day in the House—the Japanese Canadian redress question.

That was an issue that had to be dealt with by the Government of Canada, by the Parliament of Canada, and that issue was given to the Minister of State for Multiculturalism. The only reason that responsibility was handed to the Minister of State for Multiculturalism was

because Canadians of Japanese origin are considered ethnic, part of the multicultural community, and therefore somehow that issue had something to do with their ethnicity rather than—

Mrs. Browes: You did not deal with the issue at all.

Mr. Nunziata: Madam Speaker, the member likes to interrupt and, as I indicated to her on a number of other occasions, I would be pleased to debate this subject with her at any time.

But getting back to my point, that issue ought to have been dealt with by the Minister of Justice, because it was an issue affecting justice in Canada, not an issue affecting Canadians of Japanese origin because they had Japanese origins. So there again we have the mindset.

My colleague has raised some of the concerns that I have raised. How would she have reacted if the Government of Canada said that the question of settlement of aboriginal or native land claims is the responsibility of the Minister of State for Multiculturalism. Can she tell me what the reaction would have been in the aboriginal community or in the native community? I would like her also to comment whether she considers herself part of the multicultural community and whether she considers herself an ethnic?

Ms. Blondin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his lengthy and interesting question.

• (1240)

First of all, with regards to the settlement of lands claims, I think everyone knows that particular question lies with the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and with the federal government. The Prime Minister was there to sign the agreement in principle. I think it is viewed as a major priority for any government, be it Conservative, Liberal or New Democratic Party.

My reaction would have been one of shock, and I think you were anticipating that answer. It would have been unacceptable for the aboriginal groups to have been referred elsewhere to deal with this issue. This particular issue is so important that it requires inner cabinet's input. There are very fundamental issues such as taxation, cash compensation, et cetera.