

Canadian Multiculturalism Act

amendment of the Bill, some motions were ruled to be procedurally inadmissible and some the Speaker, with the guidance of the Clerks, found to be in order and are before us today for consideration by the House prior to voting on them.

● (1250)

The significance of this Bill which will provide for the legislating of the multiculturalism policy is that we have achieved a point in the evolution of multiculturalism policy that previous Liberal Governments had never achieved.

While I do not want to reflect on the ruling itself, it is regrettable that the shortcomings in the legislation made those rulings inevitable. These rulings include the application of the Bill to the Parliament of Canada, motions for the creation of a department and the establishment of a commissioner of multiculturalism. These motions were inevitably found out of order by the Speaker because the legislation was so constrained.

It is regrettable that the legislation brought forward by the previous Secretary of State contained no such provisions. That regret has been expressed by myself and other Members, as well as by many people across the country. They regret that this historic Bill has those constraints. While the Bill does much to establish the principles of multiculturalism policy, it does not fully assure Canadians that this policy will be the basis for action by government in the future.

The motions that you have ruled we are to debate today primarily provide for a recognition of multiculturalism or ethnocultural diversity in this country as a fundamental characteristic. When the Bill came out of the legislative committee, the Government spoke of that in terms of a fundamental element. To speak of diversity or even a policy as an element is poor English. The fact that it is poor English is hardly half the reason to consider means by which we could recognize the diversity of this country.

One of the consequences of the work on the constitutional accord 15 months ago, which has been approved by the Parliament of Canada and eight of ten provincial legislatures, is that there is a recognition for linguistic duality in this country. It recognizes it as a fundamental characteristic.

It is most important that this historic Bill recognize the ethnocultural diversity of the country. The Government should recognize that as well through similar language in the legislation.

The Meech Lake Accord spoke of duality as a fundamental characteristic. That left many of us convinced that there were other fundamental characteristics. This matter has become more difficult for the Government to consider in the last minutes because the two motions by a Government Member which have not been found to be in order provided for this recognition in both Clause 3 and the preamble to the Bill. I suggest that the Government should consider carefully other motions by Opposition Members who were on the standing

committee and active in the legislative committee. The Government should carefully consider that one or other of those motions for both Clause 3 and for the preamble be found acceptable by the Government when it comes time to vote on them so they may carry through the amendment to the Bill.

There is a good deal of support for this by various organizations across Canada. The Canadian Ethnocultural Council, the national organization speaking in this area, has suggested that "fundamental characteristic" rather than "element", would be a better way of wording the matter. It is more of an observation than a demand.

However, other organizations have made the case much more forcefully. These include such diverse organizations as the Manitoba Inter-Cultural Council, which has the distinction of being most representative in the sense that it is chosen by members of the community. Most of the members of the Manitoba Inter-Cultural Council are practically elected by ethnocultural communities in Manitoba.

The Council stated firmly that the language should be "fundamental characteristic". The National Congress of Italian Canadians has a most honourable place among the national ethnocultural organizations. In its brief there was a clear recognition of the fact that the Meech Lake Accord had made "fundamental characteristic" a phrase in the context of duality and should also apply to the ethnocultural diversity of the country.

The Affiliation of Multicultural and Service Agencies in British Columbia, one of the most broad organizations involved with both ethnocultural groups and immigrant services, has made the same argument that we should have "fundamental characteristic" as the provision in both Clause 3 and the preamble.

There is a diversity of arguments, from recent Canadian experience, as well as from language and from community organizations across the country that the phrasing should be "fundamental characteristic". I will watch with interest as the Minister of State for Multiculturalism (Mr. Weiner) thinks about these matters and decides what advice he should give his caucus colleagues, knowing that the motions proposed by a colleague in his own caucus are not before us for decision this afternoon.

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Madam Speaker, I wish to register our support for Motion No. 4 in the name of the Hon. Member for Thunder Bay—Nipigon (Mr. Epp). It recognizes the change in the word "fundamental element" to read "fundamental characteristic".

I too have a number of motions which address the very same aspect. It is an important matter and I wish to record our support for Motion No. 4.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): I would recognize the Hon. Minister right now, but may I suggest that we call it