

Oral Questions

Canadian cultural community. I would ask my colleague not to indulge in this kind of petty politics.

[English]

REQUEST FOR WITHDRAWAL OF COMMENTS

Mr. Ernie Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Does the Minister not recognize that his racist comments were utterly unworthy of Canada's Minister of Immigration and have to be—

Some Hon. Members: Order, order!

Mr. Crosbie: Withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: I would ask Hon. Members to restrain their enthusiasm. I think the Hon. Member would know that originally most of our families came to this country from somewhere else, except for our own native citizens, and that to call a fellow Canadian or a fellow member a racist is very offensive. I would ask the Hon. Member to withdraw that.

Mr. Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, I withdraw any suggestion that a person is racist. The concern is about comments that have a racist tinge to them.

Some Hon. Members: Order!

Mr. Speaker: I am sure the Hon. Member can put his question in such a way that he does not offend the sensibilities and the dignity of this place and, for that matter, the concepts of good will and tolerance which are at the basis of our country's success as one of the happiest nations in the world.

Mr. Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, my question is simply whether the Minister does not recognize that these comments can be offensive to Canadians. Does he not realize that to maintain his standing in the Canadian population from coast to coast he needs to withdraw these comments?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I will answer in my colleague's first language. I used the French word *déranger*. It could mean in English disturb, bother, or touch. It meant touch when I said that my region was not touched by immigration. It does not mean that that is a good thing. It means that the region was not touched by immigration. Once again I hope my colleague and hon. friend understands that on such a delicate issue in all communities in the country we do not have the right to use this kind of issue to play politics. I hope he recognizes that I do not have the right to play politics with this kind of issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

REPORTED ALLEGATIONS BY MINISTER

Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, I will try therefore in a different and perhaps more relaxed way . . .

In the evening of Saturday, January 17, during the program *La politique fédérale* broadcasted on the French network of the CBC and which was later on the subject of an article published in the Friday, January 23 issue of the *Montreal Gazette*, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, while referring to the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area, commented, and I quote:

—a long time sheltered enclave of some 300,000 Francophones, undisturbed by immigration or the presence of other realities in this country. It is therefore very pure demographically.

I am asking the Minister, and it is not Marcel Prud'homme's habit to indulge in demagoguery with Francophone and Anglophone issues, but I wish . . . If you insist, I will let other Hon. Members raise this issue, and you will see that it will be quite different. Let me raise it my way.

How could he reconcile such remarks with his duties as Minister of Immigration? How can the Minister of Immigration say that immigration is disturbing, because this is what I understood in French? I read the English text, and in all honesty to the Minister and these disquieting questions, I went over the French text of the CBC about a dozen times, and that's what I understood it to mean. My question is the same.

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the French language is such that one could use different words to describe—I insist on the word describe—a situation. It is quite clear in my mind that when I described the community I belong to as not having been disturbed, in view of the importance of my duties, my tremendous respect for the various cultural communities of our country and for this country as a whole which was built through immigration, and the tact with which I now deal with the refugee issue—for instance, I stated just yesterday that this country should forever remain open to Chilean immigrants—how could I on a television program try to describe a community by saying that it has fortunately been sheltered from immigration?

I suggest that I should be recognized consistently in the views I have expressed for the past two years concerning my Hon. colleagues in the House who belong to various cultural communities. I described a community. I indicated that it had not been affected by immigration, which is certainly true considering that it is 99 per cent Francophone.

MINISTER'S ALLEGED REFERENCE TO DEMOGRAPHIC PURITY

Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, I think that I know Quebec and the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area just as well as the Minister. I think everybody will recognize that. But how can the Minister refuse to admit that it was a mistake to talk about—

An Hon. Member: The question!

[English]

Some Hon. Members: Question.