

*Private Members' Business*

Fortunately not all members of the legion have similar narrow views. A letter published in the February 1994 issue of *The Legion* reminds legion members of the spirit of friendship and camaraderie that is supposed to be found in legion halls. It states:

It seems to me some of my comrades have forgotten that one of the things they fought for was democracy and within that democracy is the right to practise religion. If, in so doing, it means that uncovering one's head would be an offence to one's god, then why should we be affronted? These people are not slighting the memory of those who paid the greatest sacrifice for freedom. Instead, we should be open minded enough to remember that some Sikh veterans fought in the same campaigns with great distinction, and wish the fellowship of their comrades in a Legion branch without being harassed by close minded discrimination.

*[Translation]*

In an effort to appease the strong public outcry against the proposed motion being rejected, the Dominion Command urged Legion branches to reconsider their decision. I am pleased to report to this House that almost 90 per cent of the branches have now passed motions recognizing the important contribution of Jewish and Sikh servicemen in the world wars and, consequently, repealed their discriminatory policy on religious head-dress. Unfortunately, another 10 per cent did not.

*[English]*

It is important to state once again that Canadians of various religious backgrounds, including Jews and Sikhs, have in the past served and continue to serve with great distinction in Canadian and other Commonwealth forces. Their faith did not prevent them from serving and dying for their country.

In the second world war alone, 10,235 Canadian Jews served in the army, another 5,889 in the Royal Canadian Air Force and yet another 596 in the navy. I am sad to remind the House that 429 Canadian Jews were killed in action from 1939 to 1945, over 200 were wounded and 84 were made prisoners of war. In recognition of their valuable contribution to the war effort almost 200 Jewish soldiers were decorated.

Should not all veterans regardless of their gender, ethnic origins and religious affiliation receive fair and equal treatment by the Royal Canadian Legion?

By refusing to adopt a resolution permitting Jews and Sikhs to wear their religious head-dress on legion premises, some members of the legion have shown themselves to be insensitive to the Canadian reality and to the members they are supposed to represent.

Canada is not a monolithic society. Unfortunately some are still unwilling to acknowledge our cultural and religious reality. Some branches of the legion have adopted regulations that may contravene Canadian and provincial human rights legislation.

These branches need to be reminded that Canada has a long and well respected tradition of tolerance. The legion should reflect upon its decision and its actions in this light.

It is sad that in 1995 some still do not accept and respect our rich and diverse cultural and religious traditions. We must continue to work toward better understanding among all Canadians, not the opposite. This debate is extremely important for it causes us to reflect on the work that remains to be done; too much work unfortunately.

Members of the branches that have banned religious head-dress must be made aware that the kipa is not a hat to a conservative Jew. He does not wear it for vanity but in order to observe a religious injunction to cover one's head before God. With respect to the turban it is more than a simple regalia to an orthodox Sikh. It is a powerful symbol of the mystery which binds the man to his faith.

## • (1820)

Incredibly during the Calgary Stampede some branches allow their members to drink beer and socialize with their 10-gallon cowboy hats fitted nicely on their heads. The rationale behind this exemption is: What would the stampede be without our cowboy hats? Why do some legion branches believe that a legion member who wears a 10-gallon hat in the legion hall during stampede is only following tradition, while a Jew who wears a kipa or a Sikh who wears a turban is showing disrespect for the fallen.

I am concerned that Jews and Sikhs are being denied entry by some branches because some legion members are uncomfortable with fellow members who look a little different or whose headgear may demonstrate that they are a little different. These members think that maybe they do not belong. They belong as much as any other Canadian. Our differences do not divide us; they enrich us.

We each have a duty to denounce all forms of discrimination. Ironically it is in our own self-interest to do so. The Protestant theologian Neimoller said after World War II:

When the Nazis came to get the gypsies I did not say anything because I was not a gypsy. When they came to get the communists I did not say anything because I was not a communist. When they came to get the Jews I did not say anything because I was not a Jew. When they came to get me there was no one left to stand up for me.

We have a moral obligation to strive to understand one another as a people. Whether a Jew wears a kipa, a Sikh a turban, a Calgarian a cowboy hat or a Torontonion a Blue Jays cap, we are all Canadian citizens and have a right to express our beliefs without fear of discrimination.

I urge branches of the Royal Canadian Legion which prevent members from wearing a religious head-dress to reconsider