

*Adjournment Debate*

The human cry went out immediately that this dump was unacceptable to the community. I know a lot of people will say everybody is opposed to garbage being put in their backyard but this was a special circumstance because the community of Preston is the oldest large indigenous black community in Canada. It has been there for over 200 years.

When the Preston community was first settled well over 200 years ago there was an influx of blacks from a whole variety of places and a lot of them were Loyalists who escaped slavery and came into Canada.

When they landed in Canada they were sent out to what was known at the time as the barrens. Halifax was a small, well-developed regional capital. Dartmouth, on the other side of the harbour, was a very small village at that time.

The blacks who arrived were not welcomed with open arms. They were accepted because they had to be but they were put out on what was known at the time as the barrens. It was the worst land you could find in the Halifax-Dartmouth area. It was called the barrens because it was barren. They were put out there to try to eke out a living on land where barely a string bean could grow. But that is where they were left because they were not really treated as equals with whites in society.

• (1820)

Unfortunately, history has not changed as quickly as we would have liked it. What has happened over the last few years is that society as a whole has tried to grapple with that very complex and ugly monster called racism.

Indeed, about a year ago young blacks in the city of Halifax were sparked by an incident that should not have lit a fire, but they were sparked to rampage through a part of downtown Halifax. The media referred to it as a riot. What they were doing was expressing a great deal of frustration that even in today's society the needs of young blacks in our cities and all across our country still are not being realized.

That is not the way we solve our problems in Canada; we do it by compromise and consensus. The leaders in the black community, the non-black community and three levels of government got together and came up with a report. The Minister of State for Multiculturalism had a representative on that particular committee.

The report came out with a lot of recommendations. Recommendation No. 10 was in recognition of the fact that historically, black communities had been the sites of white dumps in Nova Scotia, like Afrikville in Halifax and the Crichton Avenue area of Dartmouth. In every area in Nova Scotia where a black community was adjacent to a white community, the dump was always in the black community.

It has come today to symbolize a past of oppression and discrimination, that black communities were not as good as white communities, but they were good enough to take the white communities' trash.

So, the committee on which we had a federal representative said: "Yes, we agree to all of these recommendations, and we agree that there should never be a time where a dump is placed in a black community again". Not a year later one of the signators to that report, an agency of the signator, the municipality of the county of Halifax, through the metropolitan authority, decided to place a dump next to a black community. This was not just any black community. The lands in question most likely were historic lands, the site of some of the earliest black settlements in Canada and indeed that might be the site of the underground railroad.

So, I asked the minister and the government whether they would give an assurance that they would do everything they possibly could to ensure that this dump site did not go on that particular location. It was a parliamentary secretary who had answered. I have to give full marks here because shortly after, the Minister of State for Multiculturalism met me out in the hall. He gave his commitment as a minister of the Crown and he gave the support of his department to work with the community to prepare the case and to do whatever he and this government could to ensure that we do not repeat the wrongs of the past when it comes to the location of dumps in and among black communities in Nova Scotia.

So, today I am hoping that the parliamentary secretary will be able to give me a further update as to the actions of the government and the Minister of State for Multiculturalism.

In closing, I wish once more to put on the record that this is one of those areas where partisanship has not played a role. I do not think there is a member in this House who believes that racism can go unchecked whenever it rears its head. And I want to give full marks