

Private Members' Business

I speak as a Reformer in this House. I believe there is no place in our society for the federal government to continue to fund multiculturalism. However, I do believe that there is a price to be paid for forging a new nationality out of diverse elements. Simply put, there is a fair degree of tolerance and goodwill all around. I have learned that through my personal experience.

[Translation]

Hon. Sheila Finestone (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to take part in this debate and to set the record straight and tell things the way they are. In Canada, multiculturalism is not an ideal; it is a reality.

• (1820)

[English]

Some people prefer to call this reality diversity or pluralism, or refer to the programs, policies and issues as intercultural, cross-cultural or ethnocultural. They can play the semantic game if they wish, but a rose by any other name is still a rose.

The hon. member who proposed this debate just said that we should never support group rights unless they are a majority. From my perspective and where I grew up, democracies are judged by how they treat their minorities.

Multiculturalism is not just a matter of the right of choice, which we all enjoy in our democracy in the maintaining of one's cultural roots. It is about respecting the right and ensuring it for all Canadians, whatever their race, religion, language or country of origin. It is about fostering a climate of mutual respect in a country where everyone is equal, where everyone has rights and, yes, responsibilities too. It is about equality. As our Prime Minister has said: "Equality is not about special interests or special rights. It is about social and economic justice."

[Translation]

Canada has a rich democratic tradition. The principles of justice, personal freedom, mutual respect, open mindedness, freedom, integration and the shared notions of justice have guided and shaped our social structures, our laws, our institutions and our way of life.

[English]

These are basic community and fundamental Canadian values. I would remind my hon. colleague—

[Translation]

—that the Prime Minister of Canada has often said our country's unity depends on its diversity, which is also our strength. It is in fact the essence of Canada.

[English]

I would say that we know that peace, prosperity and social harmony do not come from wishful thinking or letting the

marketplace dictate or letting personal feelings prevail. They are partners in that undertaking, perhaps. They can only come about, in my perspective and in the perspective of this party, from good public policy, collaboration with the private sector, commitment and determination, and community goodwill.

[Translation]

The aim of the federal multicultural programs is to promote understanding among the various cultural communities. Who would quarrel with this objective? These programs are intended to help newcomers integrate into the country, to eliminate the obstacles to participation by all Canadians and to break down borders and put a stop to racial discrimination.

[English]

From a business and trade perspective, we find these policies have great economic benefits. The more we know about global markets, the more we can use the cultural and linguistic knowledge of Canadians in competing in those very markets where we now do global business and the more we will all benefit.

These are some of the things that multiculturalism is all about. It is far more than a case of enhancing and preserving culture. The hon. member surely realizes that we do not live in a perfect society.

There is discrimination, and although we may be number one on the UN list, we have not reached nirvana or utopia, to my knowledge, as yet. There are still talented people out there, citizens denied full access to the economic mainstream. There are still people out there sitting on the margins who have a vital contribution to make but are not able to make it because of discrimination, because of lack of understanding.

[Translation]

Linguistic, racial and religious tensions lead to misunderstanding. We sometimes take advantage of the public good. We often want to do things our way and we find it hard to put ourselves in others' shoes.

[English]

Good public policy and programs help all of us to stand tall and walk in confidence and pride as if we were in the other person's shoes.

• (1825)

I believe that Canada's multicultural policies and programs have helped ensure peace and stability over our great land. Certainly the rest of the world seems to think so.

By weaving together all the diverse cultures that people our land, we have created a magnificent Canadian tapestry, reflecting our Canadian culture, which is more than the sum of all its dynamic parts. At a cost that is not extraordinary, less than \$1 per Canadian per year, this policy works at breaking down barriers and promoting institutional advances, thus providing individuals, as the member puts it, the freedom to pursue their