

Supply

• (1340)

Perhaps the argument can be made that this was at one time appropriate but that time has clearly passed. Both the present and the future belong to those able to cope with the enormity and diversity of our world and even our country.

While considering whether to offer as a candidate in the last election, I recall watching the American Democratic convention in Atlantic City. One of the key speakers of that convention was Senator Bill Bradley. I watched amazed while the senator from New Jersey suggested that the U.S. had occupied its superior position in the world because of its natural resources, but that now the value of physical abundance was diminishing the American's position would be maintained because as the global community became smaller the fact that so many cultures called the U.S. home would once again give it some kind of advantage on the global stage.

While I agree in part with the senator's analysis, I take great exception to his conclusion. It is Canada that is the place where members of all nations can feel at home. Canada is the place where people can truly celebrate their cultures to the greatest extent possible with government support and encouragement.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker, I was privileged to grow up in the only officially bilingual province of a bilingual country. Most of my friends and I myself support this opening up of opportunities and the protection of minority rights, and to us, the opportunities of diversity are a way of life. Granted, my generation of Anglophones in New Brunswick is mostly unilingual, but only due to circumstances. My children and other members of their generation are for the most part bilingual. To them, the struggles and debate that marked our past no longer make sense.

[English]

Earlier this century our former Prime Minister and the father of the modern Liberal Party boasted that the 20th century would belong to Canada. Many whose values tend toward materialism dismiss Laurier's pronouncement as wishful thinking.

As we enter the 21st century and as countries and people around the world struggle with questions of ethnic strife and ideological absolutism, we face a choice. Isolationism and scapegoating and finger pointing that go with it are not the answer. I believe in the need for pluralism and bilingualism in our case and the generosity of nationhood will be held up as the primary lesson learned from the 20th century. Whether we serve as a model of accommodation and compromise or become just another example of unfortunate shortsightedness depends entirely on us.

Canada is not without its challenges. Nor can we claim a past without blemish. We must confront with resolve our failure to include in a way of their choosing Canada's aboriginal communities in our abundance and comfort. We must attend to the inequities that continue to diminish us all, inequities between the genders, inequities between those of us who have been here for generations and those of us newly arrived.

We must be vigilant to ensure that programs and policies be in place to protect and promote both our official languages from assimilation regardless of where we choose to live.

Further, we must do a better job of promoting the values of which I speak. Racism exists in Canada but I believe in most cases it is born of fear and confusion rather than deep-seated hatred or profound incompatibility.

We should never underestimate the work and sometimes expense involved in nurturing a model of nationhood that requires patience, understanding and generosity of spirit. In short, it draws from all Canadians the very best in each of us.

To illustrate, in the spring of each year many go through the annual ritual of deciding which plants to grow. We travel to local markets and nurseries. Some of us, less optimistic, purchase hardy annuals with the knowledge that little effort is required for these plants to flourish. Braver souls recommit each year to buying and growing roses and other such delicacies. We similarly possess the knowledge that more work is required and that the challenge of success is more daunting. At the end of the day those who chose the roses and finer flowers will have done something special. Quite simply, as a country, whether it be from good luck or vision, we have chosen to grow roses. It is harder; it does require more work, more patience and more creativity. Even the sting from a thorny debate is not enough to thwart us in our overall pursuit. In the end we have done something special and it is through the maintenance of that the majority of Canadians remain resolute.

• (1345)

[Translation]

Mr. Nic Leblanc (Longueuil): Madam Speaker, I listened to the hon. member talking about flowers and dreams, but in my opinion, Canada, the great Canadian dream, has lost much of its lustre.

Last week, when I was in western Canada, there was a lot of talk about the Canadian dream, but people tend to ignore the debt and the annual deficit the government is unable to control. We are on the brink of bankruptcy, and these people still think this is the richest country in the world. They refer to a statement by the UN that says we rank first in standard of living, but it is a standard of living obtained on credit.