

opportunity for me to do something for my adopted country and for the unity of Canada."

While we have two official languages, or two languages of equal status, in Canada, we do not have an official culture. The Prime Minister, when he announced this policy in the other place, said that the cultures of all the people who live in Canada put together equal the Canadian culture. It is not the Scots, the Welsh, the Irish, the English, the French, the Ukrainian, the German or the Italian—it is all these cultures put together that make the distinctive and colourful culture which is the culture of Canada.

● (1530)

It is a tribute to the Prime Minister, to the government, and to Parliament as a whole that such a policy was adopted which recognizes the reality of the different cultures of the people that live in this country, because this recognition has given millions of people a feeling of belonging to this country. Multiculturalism is not just for the minority groups or ethnic groups, as some people seem to think. It is for all Canadians. Under the multicultural umbrella people can see a little bit of themselves, which makes them feel part and parcel of the fabric of Canadian society. This is a tremendously powerful feeling, honourable senators. It is a powerful feeling which instills loyalty to Canada and greater dedication to national unity.

We at the Multicultural Council believe that cultural values and cultural identity are of primary importance. If an individual, no matter to what ethnic affiliation he belongs, knows that he is accepted by other Canadians and if he knows that he is understood, then that gives him a sense of worth and a sense of belonging that enables him to stand beside other Canadians as an equal partner sharing in the future of this country.

When we speak of culture we sometimes seem to get the wrong impression of what culture is all about, and I should like to give a very brief definition of culture. In addition to the classical aspect of culture—language, painting, music, poetry, literature, sculpture—there is also the more mundane aspect of culture—the traditions, the folklore, the dialects, the food we eat, our way of life. There are some people who take a very simplistic view of life. They say, "Well, why do we have so many cultures? Why do we speak so many languages? Would it not be better if we all spoke English or if we all spoke French, if we all dressed the same way, and if we did not have all this confusion?"

On the surface that argument might appear to make some sense. However, assimilation is just impossible to achieve. Even if we all wanted to do the same things and adopt the melting-pot approach like our neighbours to the south, who after two centuries have discovered it does not work, we would also come to the same conclusion.

If we take a look at the 5,000 years of written history we find that the peoples who were making history 5,000 years ago are still here today. The Egyptians, the Syrians, the Philistines, the Jews, the people that inhabited the lands of Mesopotamia,

have still retained their individuality and cultural characteristics. Maybe their cultures have changed a little, but each one is still different from the others. Consider the wars that have taken place between these peoples, the atrocities that they have inflicted on one another. They survived Alexander the Great; they survived the Persian Empire, and they survived the crusades. There have been dictators of the left and dictators of the right who have tried to build a homogeneous society of the people under them but they did not succeed. Why not? They did not succeed, honourable senators, because it goes against the grain of nature. We are what we are and we have to accept each other for what we are. We cannot change anything even if we wanted to. Assimilation can only take place through intermarriage, but intermarriage does not happen that frequently, consequently people retain their characteristics. And what is wrong with accepting each other for what we are?

Look at world history. It is strewn with examples of intolerance; people and countries have fought one another because of their differences. Going back to people who take a simplistic view of society, they say that we should speak one language because it is too costly to speak more than one. Let me tell you, honourable senators, that countries of the world have invested not only their capital but also the cream of their youth to fight each other for their differences, and even that did not assimilate people.

The problems we had 4,000 or 5,000 years ago are still with us today. Let us just take a cursory look at the map today. What do we see? Look at Northern Ireland, look at Cyprus, look at Lebanon, look at the Middle East, look at South Africa, look at Pakistan and Bangladesh and India. All over the world there are people who are still fighting for the same reasons they were fighting each other at the time when man lived in caves. What have we in Canada done? We have adopted a policy of multiculturalism which, I believe, is the most civilized and the most mature approach to coexistence. It is the most advanced way in which people can live together.

There is another point I wish to raise, honourable senators. Some of our confrères from the Province of Quebec seem to misunderstand the intent and scope of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is not in conflict with the official languages; it complements them. We are not trying to make the languages of the other minority groups the official languages of Canada. It is an accepted fact that English and French are the official languages of this country. We recognize that the people who live in the province of Quebec are the leaders in cultural identity. If it were not for the people of the province of Quebec we would not have a policy of multiculturalism today. We would not have the kind of society we have today. We are going to do all we can to help them achieve their just aspirations.

I get the impression that some people criticize the Senate as an institution. We are respected as individuals, and there is a degree of prestige that goes with our position, but as an institution we are criticized. I cannot understand why this is so, because in the few weeks that I have been here I have witnessed a great deal of talent and I have heard penetrating