

The Constitution

I was very happy to see people from various ethnic organizations participate in the committee hearings and share their vision of Canada with us. I should like to mention one or two people who appeared at the hearings and whom I had the opportunity to question. Professor Lupul of the Ukrainian community spoke to us of his vision of Canada. He said this:

A new Constitution is like a new house. In it there must be a room for the whole family. We are part of the Canadian family and have been so for almost a century. In our new constitutional house there must not only be room for all of us, but we must enter it through the front door together, culturally equal.

That is what entrenchment of the charter of rights means to people of ethnic background. It makes them culturally equal. It allows us all to enter this new Constitution by the front door.

Some people feel that entrenchment of this equality in the Constitution is more important than a preamble. A preamble is desirable but it is symbolic. It is nice to have it and to see ourselves reflected in it, but as one witness said, it does not really mean anything. It is the specific provisions that are important. When you say there is a cultural right, it means that everyone has a right to their cultural and linguistic heritage; then if you have a problem you can go after a legislature or present your case in a court. We now have this important recognition in the charter of rights.

The Constitution must not only reflect the Canada of today but the Canada of the future. When I think of the ethnic groups in this country and the contribution they have made to it, I am happy that Section 27 has been included.

As I said in committee, I regard multiculturalism as a renewable resource much as energy or the oil in Alberta. In terms of trade or diplomacy, it is useful to have as our representatives abroad Canadians who can understand and speak Chinese or any of the languages of the other 44 groups listed in the 1971 census. This is important because language reflects who we are, our concepts and our way of thinking. If I can speak another language then I know that in another country I can be understood and perceived with all the cultural information that language holds. If I have to learn another language when I am older, I may not have that facility. I would not be sure that I could come across exactly the way I want to.

● (1650)

I think the inclusion of Section 27 in our Constitution recognizes and taps this potential which we have as Canadians. It is important we keep this in mind when we think of the charter of rights and the recognition that it has had.

In regard to multiculturalism, I want to make a personal reference to indicate to hon. members why this is so important to me. I have a Ukrainian heritage and I am very proud of it. My grandfather came from the old country. He was a homesteader in the Pine River area. He literally worked the land with the sweat of his brow. My parents followed in the same tradition. When I think of my mother, my dad, Michael and Terry, I think of them as true builders of the west. My father and my mother had to work hard to buy their farm. They

bought the farm by picking seneca roots and berries. This farm they bought was for sale because of delinquency in taxes. Not many of us have had to scratch or work that hard to make sure that our children, our succeeding generations, have the luxury which we members enjoy in this country today. My parents had to struggle with the language. In fact, my dad learned English by reading the English bible. When he could not understand the English, he would go to the Ukrainian bible for help. His dictionary is thumb-worn. He had to look up almost every word in order to learn the language and be able to communicate in the way he would like.

Our education and the possibilities we have we take literally for granted. I feel I can go to my parents and say to them, "We, as your children, appreciate the contribution you have made to Canada; section 27 recognizes your heritage and the contribution which you have made to our country."

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewycky: My constituency has a large number of ethnic groups. We try to foster the Ukrainian heritage. Dauphin is known as the home of Canada's National Ukrainian festival. For the last 15 or 16 years people from across the United States and from as far away as the down under countries have been coming to Dauphin to participate in its Ukrainian festival. They have come to learn a little about the heritage we have in Canada. Some of my American friends come to Dauphin. They tell me that they are happy to come to a place like Dauphin because they can get a little spiritual and cultural renewal and find out something about their roots. Everyone is talking about roots right now and we have the opportunity to find out something about our roots. I am happy to say that ethnic groups from my area have felt free to participate and to contribute to our multicultural heritage.

Since Dauphin was given constituency status there have been some ten Members of Parliament representing the area. I am the tenth Member of Parliament from Dauphin. Our seventh Member of Parliament, Fred Zaplitny, was the first person of non-Anglo-Saxon or French heritage to represent the riding. I recognize how he contributed to the political life of Canada at that time, and I am proud to go to his son, Rick, and tell him, "Look, Rick, in section 27 we recognize the important contribution people with an ethnic background have made." I will be happy to go to Pine River this summer when it has its eightieth anniversary. Most of the people from this community have Ukrainian backgrounds and I will be able to say to them, "We recognize the contribution you have made to Canada through Section 27 of the charter of rights."

In conclusion, I beg all members of the House to take the words of the prophet Isaiah seriously when he said: "Come, let us reason together." Let us find this common ground. I think the New Democratic Party has been spearheading the way in trying to point out areas of common grounds, such as patriation, the charter of rights and equalization. We have spoken about resources. In specifics, we have talked about rights for the aboriginal people, for the disabled and for women. We have spoken about the need for the recognition of multicultur-