



CANADA

# Debates of the Senate

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3rd SESSION

•

40th PARLIAMENT

•

VOLUME 147

•

NUMBER 68

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**RACISM IN CANADA**

**Inquiry—Debate Continued**

**Speech by:**

**The Honourable Vivienne Poy**

**Tuesday, November 23, 2010**

## THE SENATE

Tuesday, November 23, 2010

### RACISM IN CANADA

#### INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Oliver calling the attention of the Senate to the state of Pluralism, Diversity and Racism in Canada and, in particular, to how we can develop new tools to meet the challenges of the 21st century to fight hatred and racism; to reduce the number of hate crimes; and to increase Canadians' tolerance in matters of race and religion.

**Hon. Vivienne Poy:** Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Senator Oliver's inquiry on the current state of pluralism, diversity and racism in Canada. I will examine the effects our multicultural policy has had on ethnic minorities and immigration, and how we can move forward as a successful pluralistic country.

His Highness the Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the Ismaili people to whom Senator Oliver referred, defines pluralism as "peoples of diverse backgrounds and interests coming together in organizations of varying types and goals for different kinds and forms of creative expression, which are valuable and deserving of support by government and society as a whole." In other words, pluralism goes well beyond respecting cultures to accepting different ideas and different practices that may sometimes challenge our own beliefs.

The Aga Khan has praised Canada's record of supporting pluralism and has established the Global Centre for Pluralism on Sussex Drive in Ottawa as a centre for research and education, for dialogue and exchange, and as a meeting place for diverse peoples seeking common ground.

Professor Will Kymlicka, of Queen's University, recently wrote a report for the Government of Canada. In it he stated:

... we have witnessed not only growing evidence of Canada's comparative advantage in the integration of immigrants, but also growing evidence that the multiculturalism policy has played an important role in this comparative success.

... there is growing evidence that immigrants to Canada and visible or religious minorities fare better than most, if not all, other Western democracies.

He went on to state:

... recent research has revealed the following:

— There is a high level of mutual identification and acceptance among immigrants and native-born Canadians.

Despite all of the above, have we recently taken a wrong turn, at least according to our media? Consider the following: A headline in *The Globe and Mail* that stated, "Multiculturalism:

mosaic or mistake?"; a TVOntario panel called, *The End of Multiculturalism?*; the Centre for Immigration Policy Reform, a private think-tank launched this year that seems to be anti-immigration, anti-refugee, anti-Charter of Rights and Freedoms and anti-family reunification; articles in the press referring to ethnic neighbourhoods as "ghettos"; the election of Rob Ford as Mayor of Toronto — the most multicultural city in the world; and a recent *Maclean's* article entitled "Too Asian?".

At the same time, as if in direct contradiction to all these strident voices attacking the success of Canada's pluralistic model, the new Mayor of Calgary is a progressive, 38-year-old business professor named Naheed Nenshi, an Ismaili Muslim whose family came to Calgary from Tanzania. What is happening?

I believe that diversity is Canada's greatest strength. In Toronto, we have the opportunity of living in a society transformed by mass migration that is vibrant and cosmopolitan. We have constant contact with people from all over the world, which helps to broaden our minds.

I can see that multiculturalism has been a success in Canada, both in my public life and in my private life, since I am in constant contact with diverse communities across Canada. Our policy needs to be upgraded to allow for more interaction between cultures to dispel ignorance. At the same time, let us not forget that the Canadian approach has been largely successful in creating the kind of pluralistic society to which we aspire. This view is supported by all of the academic studies that look at educational outcomes, adoption of citizenship, degrees of social acceptance and political participation.

This success is also supported by most polls, even those taken immediately after the events of September 11, 2001. For example, in 2002, 83 per cent of Canadians agreed that people from different racial and cultural groups are enriching the cultural life of Canada. In 2006, the same percentage agreed that Muslims make a positive contribution to Canada.

Some have suggested that multiculturalism be renamed. "Interculturalism" and "pluralism" have been suggested. However, no matter what we call it, it is our Canadian brand. Instead of renaming it, we should look at it as an evolving policy, as a work-in-progress.

We all know the constant narrative emerging from Europe about the failure of multiculturalism. Honourable senators, we are not Germany or France — countries that do not have a multicultural policy, so their situation cannot be compared to our Canadian model. If anything, the lesson we should take from Germany is that their treatment of Turkish temporary workers has led to their current impasse, especially since our present government is increasingly opting for temporary workers. We do not want to go down the German path.

The Institute for Research on Public Policy, when comparing Canada to Europe in a major study in 2007 entitled *Belonging: diversity, recognition and shared citizenship in Canada* found that:

. . . there is little evidence of the deep social segregation feared in parts of Europe. . . . Canada is not “sleepwalking into segregation.” There is no justification for a U-turn in multiculturalism policies comparable to that underway in some European countries.

One of the major challenges we are facing is how religion is to be accommodated within the context of multiculturalism. In Ontario, inclusion of Sharia law in family law was debated, as was the issue of public funding of all religious schools. Both initiatives were abandoned.

In Quebec, we all know about the Bouchard-Taylor Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences and the proposed law to ban the wearing of the niqab when receiving or delivering public services.

Meanwhile in Ontario, a recent court order opens the door to a woman wearing a niqab while testifying in court. We have had a number of honour killings reported, which has spurred public debate about religious diversity. The so-called honour killing is not about diversity. It is murder, and our law treats it as such.

Charles Taylor, co-author of the Quebec report, calls for dialogue, without which, he says, we will lose our way. Taylor says that the recent European Islamophobia is “the kind of utterly ignorant stupidity on which democratic societies flounder.” He goes on to say “but that it is true of any kind of dismissive view of the other.”

• (1600)

Unfortunately, when politicians manipulate multicultural policies and start anti-immigrant and anti-refugee rhetoric for their own political capital, they often spur on racism against specific communities. We need to look no further than the recent arrival of a boatload of Tamils claiming refugee status and the political rhetoric surrounding this arrival, which has heightened tensions around immigration and towards asylum seekers as well as established visible minority communities.

Please note that when individual refugee claimants arrive at our airports, there is no outcry. These people are fortunate enough to arrive by plane instead of risking a dangerous journey across the ocean on leaky boats.

Bill C-49, which is in second reading in the other place, is meant to deter human smuggling activities that are international operations. The bill will end up targeting refugee claimants who arrive in groups with arbitrary mandatory detention for up to one year, with no opportunity for appeal in the case of a negative decision.

According to Amnesty International, the bill fails to honour our legal obligations under Canadian and international law and will do nothing to prevent human smuggling.

Another challenge for our pluralistic model is the declining economic performance of recent immigrants, especially when compared to earlier immigrant cohorts. Put simply, new immigrants are taking longer to catch up in their earnings to the native Canadian-born residents. The underemployment of

new immigrants is costing our country billions in lost revenue. Interestingly, immigrants often tell me that they are willing to sacrifice their own careers for the sake of a better future for their children.

The fact of underemployment, while meriting serious policy discussions around foreign credential recognition, accreditation and labour market planning, does not negate the positive trends in terms of social and political integration of immigrants reflected in positive education outcomes, intermarriage between different cultural groups, adoption of citizenship and a sense of national pride.

Is there racial conflict in Canada? Yes, there is, as can happen in any human society, but it does not mean that our multicultural policy is not working. Our ethnic neighbourhoods do not consist of an underclass living in ghettos as they do in Europe. In fact, many of these neighbourhoods are affluent.

By the second generation, most of the residents integrate into Canadian society and move into other neighbourhoods. It is interesting to note that the number of mixed unions between a visible and non-visible minority grew by 33 per cent between the 2001 Census and the 2006 Census. According to a poll this spring, the majority of parents have no problem with their children marrying someone from another race.

Immigrants, as well as their children, show a strong desire to engage in our political system. They apply for citizenship at more than double the rate in the United States. They are active voters and participate as candidates for public service. More foreign-born citizens are elected to Parliament in Canada than in any other country, both in absolute numbers and in terms of parity with their percentage of population.

A report prepared at the end of 2008 for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada found that most second-generation immigrants were doing as well or better than their Canadian-born counterparts, especially with respect to education. Many of them are transnationals who move freely between continents. Everywhere they go, they bring with them Canadian values that they grew up with.

A new look by Ryerson University at the role of immigrants in spurring on innovation in Canada found that despite making up only 20 per cent of the population, at least 35 per cent of our 1,800 Canada research chairs are foreign born. All of these statistics suggest that our tapestry is intact. Unless Canadian families start having more children, we will be dependent on immigration for all our net labour growth by 2017, which is six years from now.

Diversity is a benefit to Canada as long as we keep improving the way we solve problems when they appear, and in this process, the media has a huge responsibility. As Charles Taylor said:

Our societies will hold together only if we talk to each other with openness and frankness, and, in doing so, recreate a certain sense of solidarity from all our different roots.

(On motion of Senator Andreychuk, debate adjourned.)