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June 15, 1989

Dear friend:

Recently I wrote to you about the Komagata Maru incident. At the time I indicated that I had made a request for funding from the provincial government and the provincial government had turned down the request. You may recall that I attached to my letter a copy of a press release, together with the statement in Hansard.

I recently had the opportunity to raise the matter of funding for a memorial of the Komagata Maru again in the Legislature. I am sorry to report that the Premier and the Minister of Tourism both went out of their way to indicate that the province was unwilling to provide funding for a Komagata Maru commemorative.

Regrettably, the Premier chose to go further and made a number of derogatory comments as to myself, in particular, and some further comments with respect to the Indo-Canadian community. I have taken the liberty of attaching a copy of the entire debate between the Premier and I with respect to the Komagata Maru incident. I am sure that you will be able to judge for yourself as to whether the Premier's statements bordered on racism. However, it's clear the Premier was making racial allusions. I am also enclosing newspaper articles from the Times Colonist and the Vancouver Sun for your information.

In my view, it was a sad day in British Columbia history. We were discussing the tragedy of the Komagata Maru incident. I would like to have thought that we had learned from the lessons of history and would take steps to vow that such an event would not be repeated. Instead, the Premier chose to bring an ugly tone to our deliberations.

Despite the Premier's statements, I want to assure you that myself, Mike Harcourt and my colleagues in the New Democratic Party will continue to work hard to try to convince the provincial government to reverse its position with respect to funding for a commemorative.

Yours truly,

Moe Sihota, MLA
Esquimalt-Port Renfrew

Attachments



PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
3rd Session, 34th Parliament
OFFICIAL REPORT OF
DEBATES OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
(Excerpt)

Tuesday, June 13, 1989
Afternoon Sitting
Volume 14 Number 6

While the minister is looking that over with his deputy, I want to move to another issue: the minister's statement this morning with respect to the *Komagata Maru*, which I read with some interest. I want to tell the minister that I was, quite frankly and honestly, surprised at the response he gave me in question period when I asked him about the *Komagata Maru* several weeks ago. I know that since then the minister and the Premier have received several bits of correspondence from Indo-Canadian groups across the province. I know the Premier made certain assurances when he was speaking in Surrey. I know the Premier also received correspondence from the Khalsa Diwan Society, which has represented the Indo-Canadian community in British Columbia since 1906.

HON. MR. VANDER ZALM: How come you're reading my mail?

MR. SIHOTA: The Premier wants to know why I'm reading his mail. It's because he doesn't read it. Groups often wonder why he takes so long to respond. They send me copies and we respond.

We responded in that instance by raising in this House the request of the Indo-Canadian community to have a commemorative established in British Columbia with respect to the *Komagata Maru* incident. It wasn't a large request, and it wasn't a request for a significant financial contribution. The minister said — and he surprised me at the time — no, he would not provide any assistance to the Indo-Canadian community in that regard. Later on in press reports, he indicated that the reason he failed to do so was that no requests had been made to government along those lines. Since that time I'm sure the minister has been aware that a whole raft of correspondence making such requests had been directed to the

Premier and to him. That, of course, blows out of the water the argument the minister put forward at that time. Subsequently the government had an opportunity to reconsider its determination to not provide any level of assistance.

I want to let the minister know that the *Komagata Maru* incident is a flashpoint in terms of the Indo-Canadian community in British Columbia. It is a dark day in Canadian history. It is a sad and tragic event that occurred in waters just off the shore of Vancouver, when 376 British subjects showed up to this British dominion and asked for the opportunity to set up here. They were met with a deluge of bigotry, racism and insensitivity. For two months they sat in that harbour trying to assert their rights as British subjects. They lost the battle, but fortunately they won the war, and ultimately individuals from my family and others were able to settle here and, I believe, make a first-class contribution to this nation.

[2:45]

I happen to stand as someone who represents that ethnic community because of my ethnic background, and I take some pleasure in the fact that I am the first one from the Indo-Canadian community ever to be elected to a Legislature in British Columbia. So it was not unexpected that members of that community would let me be informed of their request to government.

In light of the minister's response, it's not surprising that they also let me know of their outrage at the minister's statement. This is an issue that in some ways has tremendous analogies to the Japanese redress issue. In that instance, of course, there was compensation paid to the Japanese; in this instance no compensation is expected or requested. An apology may be in order for what transpired in Vancouver between May 23 and July 24, 1914, some 75 years ago. An official apology is sought, I know, at all levels — municipal, federal and provincial — but no compensation in that same fashion is requested.

Some signal from government that this type of issue will never again come upon us in Canadian society is what the Indo-Canadian community wants. One of the ways to make sure that signal is maintained forever is through some type of commemorative, recognizing that the event occurred and committing that it will never happen again. It's not a very expensive request, but it is a significant and meaningful one on the part of that community, and it would be in order for the government to recognize it with that in mind.

I know that the minister said this morning that some money will be put into a video to commemorate that incident, and I give him credit for that. Obviously the government has embarked upon damage control after the minister's initial comments, which in the ethnic press were severely criticized, editorial after editorial. But it would be far more appropriate for the minister — who in some ways insulted the Indo-Canadian community in this province by what he said in this House — to now revisit the issue and state in this House. . . .

HON. MR. REID: Point of order. I think the member is out of order. I alluded to that subject this morning. He's going beyond the bounds of the estimates. I have a letter that I'm going to bring forward that I received from the Indo-Canadian community, which I'd like to read into the record as soon as I can, and it may put to bed some of the positions he's taking.

MR. SIHOTA: I have 66 letters I'd be happy to read into the record as well that reinforce what I'm saying. I'll give the minister the benefit of the opportunity to read it into the record. I don't think that it addresses the entirety of the issue; what would address it is a statement now from the minister agreeing to make sure that a commemorative is established in Vancouver by the province recognizing this event — this sad day in Canadian history — and making a commitment through that commemorative that this type of event would never happen again. Is the minister now prepared to reverse himself and take that step?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shall vote 70 pass?

MR. SIHOTA: The minister said he had a letter. He said he wanted to put something on the record. I'm at a loss to understand why, given the opportunity, the minister is not prepared to say anything further.

I will tell the minister this: I'll be quite happy to mail out to all of those groups that I did the initial mailing to after his response in question period my comments on the record today as well as his comments. I want to give him the opportunity to deal with this rather significant component in British Columbia society and offer his words to them. I'll make a commitment: I will mail out what I say and also what he says. Is the minister now prepared to reverse himself and make a commitment that his government will establish that commemorative?

Interjection.

MR. SIHOTA: It's in *Hansard*; it's better than writing.

Could the minister explain why he's not prepared to answer this very basic question? I thought he had a letter. The minister can nod. I see a letter has now arrived at his desk. I see him now opening the letter. I see him now putting down the letter.

Interjection.

MR. SIHOTA: It's in the mail. I want to let the minister know that this is not a trivial issue to that ethnic community. I'm not the critic for multiculturalism and seldom do I stand up in the House and talk about issues that relate to the ethnic community where I find my roots, but this is one issue which not only I feel deeply about but every individual of Indo-Canadian persuasion in this country feels very passionately about.

Interjection.

MR. SIHOTA: Heckling from the Premier and the silence of the minister do nothing to give that community some comfort that the government is now prepared to reconsider its earlier statement.

You've had correspondence that goes back months in this regard. All those contacts that the government makes with the Indo-Canadian community are seen as showbiz if they aren't backed up with some type of action. The community doesn't ask much in terms of action from government. This happens to be one of the things that the Indo-Canadian community has asked for.

I know the Premier most recently visited a temple in Surrey. I remember the famous visit he made to the Sikh temple in Richmond during the election campaign. I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs (Hon. Mrs. Johnston) has as well. All those things don't matter one iota if they're done simply as some type of show without any follow-up action.

The follow-up action that the Indo-Canadian community is asking for is some type of commemorative dealing with the *Komagata Maru* incident. I want to ask the minister again, because I see his assistants have now returned: Is he prepared to reverse himself and to establish the commemorative that the community has asked for? Is he now prepared to reverse himself?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just a comment to remind hon. members that they have the right to ask any question they please, as long as it's in order, but the minister is not compelled to respond. The member has asked his question in three or four different ways, and perhaps it might be time to go on to another subject.

MR. SIHOTA: Mr. Chairman, let the record show that the minister chose not to utter one word, chose not to make one commitment, chose not to say one thing that would amount to even an ounce of reconsideration on his part. Shame on the minister for that type of arrogance!

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I'm sorry to interrupt you again, but your time has expired under standing orders.

MR. CLARK: We were listening to the member, so I'd like him to continue.

MR. SIHOTA: Let the record note that the minister is not prepared to utter one word. In 1914 the authorities sat silent in a similar way while for two months that boat sat at Burrard Inlet. For two months provincial politicians remained silent on the racism and bigotry that was being demonstrated in British Columbia. When I consider the silence of the minister, I can't help but reflect on the comparisons.

The Chairman has asked me to move on to another topic. I'll give the minister one last chance to respond. If he doesn't, I'll move on. Is the minister prepared to respond?

HON. MR. REID: I'm going to respond in the following manner.

My ministry is in receipt of ongoing reports and recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Cultural Heritage. The committee is made up of a cross-section of the ethnic community of the province of B.C. Far be it from this government — this open government — to do and make decisions in isolation from an advisory committee which is put in place to do the very things this member is demanding. We're waiting for a report and some recommendations back from that committee.

The Advisory Committee on Cultural Heritage is made up of the following members: Baldwin Ackermann from Richmond; Mark Ando from West Vancouver; Steve Babakaiff from Grand Forks; Jacques Baillaut from Vancouver; Betty Bautista from Prince Rupert; Tony Bevacqua from Fort St. John; Celso Boscaroli from Burnaby; Narinder Dhir from Burnaby; Ranjit Diwana from Matsqui, Ed Eduljee from North Vancouver; Mike Kennedy from Prince George; Riasat Khan from Vancouver; Kewal Khosla, an Indo-Canadian from Surrey and chairman of the committee — there are some Indo-Canadians on this list; Ben Lee from Kelowna; Bang Luu from Vancouver; Isaac Moss from Vancouver; Irene Olljum from Vancouver; Buncy Pagely, an Indo-Canadian from Victoria; Sylvia Posch from Richmond; Rudy Spence from Burnaby; John Stashuk from Vancouver; Jan Van Bruchem from Vancouver; K.T. Yue from Vancouver; Alan Yuen from Victoria.

Mr. Member, these people represent an advisory committee to this minister. Anything beyond what has currently been agreed to will not be advanced without advice from our cultural ethnic community advisers. You may have a select group of people that you converse with, Mr. Member, but we went throughout the province to select ideal people to represent the community, including a large section of the Indo-Canadian community, which I'm proud are on this committee, including the chairman. Far be it from me as the minister responsible to do anything contrary to open government in relation to this committee.

HON. MR. VANDER ZALM: I've been sitting here listening to the member from Esquimalt make all sorts of comments about how he thinks that we somehow do not care about those who were involved with the *Komagata Maru* back 75 years ago, and I take great exception to that.

[3:00]

I happen to have a lot of Indo-Canadians in my constituency. Yes, I do visit these Indo-Canadians during my time in the constituency and not only during elections. I visit these temples and these people during their other activities on numerous occasions. I have a good rapport with those of East Indian descent in my constituency. For that member to stand up and suggest that something that happened before any of us in the House here were born is an event that we must, as people here today, somehow assume responsibility for, directly or other-

wise, and we're somehow not concerned, I would suggest is an insult and simply an attempt by that member to make politics out of a very serious issue. We all regret what happened 75 years ago, but no one here was born at the time and had any control or can today correct what occurred 75 years ago.

The member stands up in the House and is accusing us and suggesting we do not care. I can recall going to the temple in Surrey where we were shown a video and where it was explained to us in some detail what exactly occurred 75 years ago according to all of the documentation and the video they had available at that particular event. A suggestion was then made as well by someone there that perhaps maybe there could be some recognition through us, meaning anyone in the Legislature, participating in that day set aside this summer when they will remember the event and, of course, express the regrets for it having happened.

There was no suggestion that we should somehow, as a government, put up the funds. Frankly, I think the Indo-Canadian community probably had it in mind to do this themselves as their way of showing Canadians and British Columbians that it was an event that should not be forgotten. They weren't looking to government to see this done. Frankly, if they came to me, as I hope you might if they came to you, I would probably contribute personally, not suggest that somehow government must do this. If you wish to make a sacrifice, Mr. Member, if you're as sincere as you claim to be, if you're the only one who's right and cares enough, if that's your suggestion, then perhaps instead of asking government to do this, maybe you should set the example and personally make that first contribution and then ask others to do likewise.

It's easy for you to stand up there and say that you're the only one who cares, that you're the only one who's right and that no one here somehow in your opinion is right. You want to get this into the record, I gather, so that you might distribute it to people in the Indo-Canadian community in order to further emphasize that point — and I know that's what you have in mind; I'm satisfied that's what you have in mind. I would suggest that you're using your position, your heritage and this assembly abusively. You ought to instead, if you're so concerned, set the example, make the contribution, and not turn to government but say: "I, as a British Columbian — never mind government — wish to contribute something to see this happen because I care, and I would ask British Columbians individually to join in and make that contribution because they care."

You know, Mr. Member, that's hard for you NDP-ers to understand, but it's personal contributions that really count. It isn't always government. It shouldn't always be government. And people, regardless of their ethnic origin — and least of all, frankly, in my opinion, the Indo-Canadians, because they are a wonderfully hard-working, independent people who do not turn to government at every turn.... That's why I don't believe the majority of them are NDP, frankly. I think very few are, only a few lost ones.

These people will, I'm sure, much more appreciate it when there is that personal commitment and when it's not always government.

The minister cares and the minister was responsible for the establishment of a multicultural committee, a committee that has the opportunity and does take the time and really creates the opportunities for people to come forth and make submissions to give us their views on what we can do to assist the various cultural communities in our province. It's working wonderfully well.

It was the minister's initiative, and the people from the list, as he suggested, are across the spectrum. There are a number of people representing the Indo-Canadian community. The chairman certainly is one I know extremely well and he is a wonderful, very committed, extremely dedicated individual. They are all doing a good job and I'm sure that this will continue. They care; the minister cares; we all care.

You are not the only one who somehow cares about all of this, Mr. Member. Just because your demands of government aren't always responded to as you would have it, and just because I stand here today and say that maybe you should consider setting the example by contributing personally and asking others to do likewise, maybe you should rethink what has been said. It doesn't mean you're the right one.

MR. BARNES: Mr. Chairman, I'm sure that the member for Esquimalt-Port Renfrew is going to respond to the Premier directly. He certainly needs no defence from me. I think the Premier is probably at his sanctimonious best in standing here this afternoon and telling the House that some of us who were not born at the particular time of the unfortunate incident with the *Komagata Maru* should have no responsibility or be insensitive to those historic events.

Interjections.

MR. BARNES: Just hang on a moment. I'll tell you what you are saying. What you are implying....

Interjections.

MR. BARNES: You seem to be impatient. You're implying that if you weren't born at the time, you have no responsibility or concern. What is your point?

HON. MR. BRUMMET: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, it was my understanding that in estimates the questions and answers are to be relevant to the minister's estimates. I wonder how this discussion that we're hearing right now in any way — by any stretch of the imagination — could be considered relevant.

MR. BARNES: Mr. Chairman, if I'm incorrect, then.... I'm sure the minister will correct himself

later. We'll be reading the Blues to see exactly what he meant by saying that some of us weren't even born at the time. I think the record speaks for itself.

Some of us weren't born when the Indian lands were cut off, either. That's another matter that we have to address. Some of us were not born when the Japanese Canadians were interned, and that is another matter we have addressed.

Notwithstanding any of that, all the member is saying is that this is a part of our history that we should address to the best of our ability and in a sensitive way by showing some kind of gesture or commemorative effort on behalf of government and of the people of the province of British Columbia, in order to show some leadership and some sensitivity. I'm not suggesting that we can change history, but we must recognize in an honest, forthright way that those unfortunate events did occur. That's all this debate is about. You are trying to twist it into ulterior motives and political posturing, which has nothing to do with the situation. This is what you're very good at, Mr. Premier.

This is all I wanted to say, and I'm sure the member has no need to be concerned about the tactics you're using. But it's about time we stopped to realize that things that were wrong in the past should be recognized, and we shouldn't try to duck and dodge. This Premier is trying to suggest that we should go to the individuals, and they should be showing leadership. We're talking about the government; we are the leaders. This is why we're talking about multiculturalism, because your government has not taken the leadership and has not shown the responsibility.

Interjections.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, please.

MR. BARNES: Mr. Chairman, the Premier and the Provincial Secretary have suggested that the multicultural advisory body of 24 individuals across this province are going to be consulted and depended upon to make recommendations with respect to public policy on multiculturalism. This will be the first time in the history of this province that the government has taken the recommendations from any advisory body and followed them. In the past you've been saying that you never would do such a thing; now you're telling us that you're going to follow this body. Well, it will be the first time. I say hear, hear — if you're going to do it. Maybe democracy is finally arriving, but we shall see.

I hope that you will be telling us when they will be holding public meetings and giving us an opportunity to make representation, and I hope that you will be an open government and let us know what they really think. I'm sure that they are going to be very interested in this debate this afternoon.

HON. MR. VANDER ZALM: Mr. Chairman, again I have to respond briefly to the member for Vancouver Centre, who is attributing motives to what I said

that obviously weren't there, and the record will show this. But let me say again — and I wanted to emphasize this in my comments — that if you really care, don't turn to government. Don't say, "We want somebody else to give all of this recognition," because that's so easy. It's so easy for you, the member for Vancouver Centre and the member for Esquimalt-Port Renfrew, to stand up here and say: "I care. The government should pay for something." Are you willing to contribute something, Mr. Member for Vancouver Centre? Do you care so much that you think government should do it all? Or are you really prepared to become involved personally? Is the member for Esquimalt-Port Renfrew prepared to become involved personally? Maybe he will, if he's called upon now, but I didn't hear that suggestion earlier. It was that government should do this; government must do that. I say: care enough to become personally involved.

It was, after all, as I said, 75 years ago.

MRS. BOONE: It's the minister's estimates.

HON. MR. VANDER ZALM: The member for Prince George North keeps interfering, Mr. Chairman. She keeps saying it's the minister's estimates. I came here to listen to the minister's estimates, and frankly, it has been all but that since we began. But maybe that will change.

Again, Mr. Member, what I suggested was that if you cared so much, help out personally. Do something yourself.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, the matter of relevancy, which was raised as a point of order... The relevancy in this particular issue... I suppose the Chair has at least accepted the fact that it is relevant because the minister is responsible for this particular subject. The Chair suggested some 25 minutes ago that the subject had been very well canvassed and that perhaps it was time we moved along to something else. I just bring that to your attention again. It has been well canvassed. I have heard the same questions asked a number of times...

Interjection.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would really appreciate it if the member for Prince George North (Mrs. Boone) would not interrupt the Chair.

The debate continues.

MR. SIHOTA: I want the Premier to understand, first of all, that I am going to try to be very measured in my response, because my gut is telling me to respond in a totally different way. I want him to listen with care.

Does the Premier understand that he and I can't change history, but that he and I can show that we have learned from the lessons of history and that we have all changed? That's what this debate is all about: to show that as a consequence of something that

occurred 75 years ago, we as a society have come a long way and we are now prepared to vow that those events that occurred then will never be repeated. That's what this debate is all about. It's not about personal contributions; it's all about lessons learned from history.

Is the Premier saying that the Canadian government was wrong when it apologized to the Japanese? Are you saying, Mr. Premier, that it was wrong to take that action, to reflect on the errors of those who were responsible for the internment of the Japanese, and to apologize today and vow that it will never happen again? Is the Premier saying that the Dutch were wrong in redressing their actions in Indonesia? What does the Premier intend to say to the Chinese when they come to government, as they inevitably will, and ask for some apology, both provincial and federal, with respect to the Chinese head tax?

[3:15]

If you accept the Premier's comments, he would say that we were wrong to apologize as a nation to the Japanese, that the Dutch were wrong in their redressing in Indonesia, and that he would not entertain an apology to the Chinese on the basis that he wasn't in power then, somebody else was, and that they should go back to those who have long gone, to those who perpetrated the injustice.

I think those examples should get the Premier to reflect on what he has just had to say and to recognize that there are times for us — all of us, because all of us have a multicultural heritage; all of us have family who have come from different portions of the world — to think that perhaps when groups make approaches to government and ask that the errors of the past be commemorated, recognized and vowed not to be repeated, that's exactly what should happen.

This is not a large request. The Premier is right; the Indo-Canadian community seldom comes to government and asks for financial assistance. This is a symbolic request, in part an approach to government because it was government — provincially, federally and municipally — that perpetrated the type of bigotry we saw in this country 75 years ago. They are saying: "Yes, we would like government to set the example because it was they themselves that caused the injustice." Is it really wrong for them to come to government and ask for a symbolic gesture? I say no.

It's not a matter of personal contributions. I would be quite happy to talk to the Premier — not here today, but outside this chamber at any other time — about my personal contributions to that community and my personal involvement in this issue as well, which, I would venture to say, far surpasses his. It's a matter of recognizing what happened 75 years ago and saying that it ought not happen again.

The Premier said during his comments that he would think that the Indo-Canadian community would want to do it themselves and not come to government. No doubt after they read what the Premier had to say — the Premier's correct; these comments will be mailed out — they will be suffi-

ciently offended to choose to bypass this government in its entirety.

The request for funds was made to the Premier in correspondence that he received and correspondence that I have, so for him to suggest that no such request came forward is erroneous. The same request was made to the advisory council that the Minister of Tourism talks about. I've talked to the people on that council, and they are aware that this request was made to them. Don't try to tell me today, Mr. Minister, that they aren't seized of the matter, that they aren't aware of the request — they are. They've been seized of it for quite some time.

It's interesting, Mr. Minister, to watch how your story changes. On the first day, it was that no request had been made. The Indo-Canadian community wrote to the minister and the Premier requesting funds. On the second day, this morning, the attitude was: "...this is an issue which historically concerns only the government of Canada" — and that's why they turned down the application. The minister admits to knowing history and, indeed, what history says about what British Columbia did. When that wasn't good enough. . . .

HON. MR. REID: Read the rest of it. You weren't here, so read the rest of it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, please. The Chair will recognize individual members when it's time for them to speak.

MR. SIHOTA: The minister, who is unprepared to respond to my questions. . .

HON. MR. REID: I did this morning and you weren't here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, please.

MR. SIHOTA: . . . who is unprepared to rise from his seat and address the issue in the best traditions of the House, seems to have all sorts of courage when he's sitting on his butt and can heckle back and forth.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I don't think that that can be construed as parliamentary language. Perhaps you could withdraw it.

MR. SIHOTA: I'll withdraw the reference to the minister's butt.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please continue.

HON. MR. VEITCH: Withdraw the whole statement. Resign!

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, please.

HON. MR. VEITCH: Where's your rake?

MR. SIHOTA: Did the minister say where's my rug?

HON. MR. VEITCH: Where's your rake? Muck rake.

MR. SIHOTA: I want the Minister of State for Vancouver Island (Hon. Mr. Huberts), the Minister of Tourism, the Premier and the Minister of Municipal Affairs (Hon. Mrs. Johnston) to understand that there is a creeping anger in the Indo-Canadian community. Their comments today in this Legislature have done nothing to arrest that anger and in fact have served to inflame it. There will be a reaction to this, and it's not one that the government is going to be proud of. I want to give the minister one more chance.

HON. MR. BRUMMET: Don't get involved in it...

MR. SIHOTA: The Minister of Education heckles that this is a racist discussion.

HON. MR. BRUMMET: That's what you're doing; you're trying to make it into a racist issue.

MR. SIHOTA: We're talking about a racial injustice which occurred in this province 75 years ago. We're talking about saying as a society that we should put an end to racism, and the minister makes that type of comment.

HON. MR. BRUMMET: That's what you're doing; you're trying to turn it into a racist issue.

MR. SIHOTA: The minister suggests a motive on my part. I'll tell the minister what the motive is: simply to get the government in this province to recognize that an injustice occurred 75 years ago and to establish some type of commemorative, swearing that it would never happen again. That's the motive. There's no need for the government and its ministers to feel defensive. There's no need for them to feel fear that they're being lulled into some corner.

HON. MRS. JOHNSTON: You're flattering yourself.

MR. SIHOTA: Let *Hansard* record that minister after minister — now the member for Surrey-Newton (Hon. Mrs. Johnston) — is choosing to heckle. They're very sensitive to this issue. I'm going to give the minister a chance. Is the government prepared to reverse itself and establish a commemorative in Vancouver recognizing that this event occurred, and secondly, swearing that it will never happen again? It's a very, very simple request. Is the minister prepared to do so?

HON. MR. VANDER ZALM: I don't know how long this debate will continue, but I don't think I'm alone. I think everyone in this House, whether they're down on the floor or in the gallery, should be offended by the comments that have been made by the member for Esquimalt. There is not anywhere in the world a more charitable, a more generous, a more

tolerant, a more sympathetic people than British Columbians and Canadians. When I hear the member from Esquimalt say that he will take out what's been said — his words; he'll probably selectively clip them — and mail this to the Indo-Canadian people... He says, as a part of his message just a moment ago, that they'll be down on government; they'll be mad; they'll be upset; and it will create all sorts of furore. What are you trying to do? What is your motive, I ask you? Are you part of this harmony that British Columbia and Canada is noted for, or are you simply attempting to incite a little bit of friction among the various cultural groups in this province?

MR. CLARK: On a point of order, we've heard claptrap in here before, but this is offensive in the extreme from the Premier. He should withdraw any motives imputed to the member for Esquimalt-Port Renfrew, and he should withdraw unconditionally.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Certainly, it's against the rules of the House to impute motives to any member. If the Premier was imputing motives, perhaps he would withdraw.

HON. MR. VANDER ZALM: What motives? I was questioning his motives, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would hon. members would take their seats. Did the second member for Vancouver East want to rise on another point of order?

MR. CLARK: Yes, on a point of order. The Premier very clearly accused the member for Esquimalt-Port Renfrew of inciting racial hatred in this province. He should withdraw that remark categorically.

HON. MR. REE: The member for Vancouver East made certain comments. I'm sure when he reads the Blues tomorrow it will be otherwise. My ears distinctly heard the Premier ask the member for Esquimalt-Port Renfrew what his motives were. He was asking a question; he was not saying that his motives were adverse.

MR. SIHOTA: The rule, as I understand it, deals with imputing a motive. In the course of his comments the Premier was clearly imputing a motive to me and suggesting that somehow these comments were designed to incur some type of racial backlash in this province.

Mr. Chairman, first of all...

Interjection.

MR. SIHOTA: I'm rising on a point of order here. I want the Premier, first of all, to withdraw...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the member finished with his point of order?

MR. SIHOTA: No, I'm not; I'm just about finished. I want to say this. First of all, I said during the text of

my comments exactly what my motive was. I put it on the record what I was trying to do very clearly, in terms of saying I was trying to get the government to fund some type of commemorative in Vancouver. I made that very clear. Then there was heckling with respect to my motive.

For the Premier, in light of that explanation, Mr. Chairman, to make the statement that he has. . . .

Interjections.

MR. SIHOTA: I'm not trying to make a speech; I'm arguing a point of order.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. member has gone on at some length on this point of order. I think his point has been made already.

MR. SIHOTA: I'm asking the Premier to withdraw his statement.

HON. MR. VANDER ZALM: Mr. Chairman, if there was anything that was offensive in my comments, I withdraw them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

[3:30]

HON. MR. VANDER ZALM: Mr. Chairman, as I said, without a doubt British Columbians and Canadians are the most charitable and most tolerant people in the world. We are a mix of people from all parts of the world. Many of us come from countries where undoubtedly there have been frictions and there have been very regrettable events between countries. I'm sure the Scots will argue that the Brits should erect something for what might have been done some many years back as they feuded. It has occurred between different groups, and it's regrettable always. We certainly would hope that such would never, ever occur again, and from what I see in our society, our people would not stand for that sort of thing.

If it helps, I too will apologize for what the Canadian government at the time permitted to happen in Vancouver. It happened 75 years ago. It was an immigration matter. It was a federal situation. If it helps, I too will apologize, as I'm sure everyone in the gallery and elsewhere would like to, for what occurred during those weeks and months 75 years ago.

But I think that in this House, if we really want to serve the Indo-Canadian community, the Dutch-Canadian community, the Scottish Canadians, the French Canadians, it doesn't matter which, let's call them all British Columbian Canadians. . . . If we really want to serve those people, let's talk about the good things that are happening today. Let's talk about how people in various groups are in fact working together in order to establish a better relationship between all of the people in the province.

I'm proud of what I see, I'm proud of British Columbia, and I'm proud of British Columbians, and

I'll not be a party to stirring up and attempting to divide between one group or the other. I can assure the member from Esquimalt that I'll not be mauling out all of this discussion that took place today to the various ethnic groups. I'll not do that. I'll not attempt to use your comments to stir up ill feelings, perhaps, between one or the other. I think that's wrong. I think we ought to instead be talking about the many positive things that are happening and the good relations between people of all races and all backgrounds in this province. We have a lot to be proud of. We have without a doubt the kindest, the most tolerant, the most charitable people anywhere in the world right here in British Columbia.

HON. MR. REID: To the member who was absent this morning, I want to read into the record one more time — because he selectively used only a couple of lines — the position on the *Komagata Maru* incident.

"It reminds us that immigration and the changing face of society touch very deep emotions" — and it's pretty obvious. "It reminds us that if we are to have a society which is both diverse and tolerant, we must work at it. All members here would subscribe to the ideal of a society where British Columbians of all cultural backgrounds work and live together harmoniously.

"There are things which we can do as a society, but there are equally important things we can do as individuals to help achieve this ideal.

"The anniversary of this unhappy page in our history is a fitting occasion for all of us to re-examine our attitudes and to rededicate ourselves to the ideal of a harmonious and tolerant society.

"I have been asked whether the province is planning any memorial to the *Komagata Maru* incident, and I have indicated that. . . ." We are not planning a memorial "...first, because this is an issue which historically concerns only the government of Canada, and secondly. . . I believe that an initiative should not be from the government but from the community itself.

"The *Komagata Maru* Foundation of Canada was recently formed by a representative group of Indo-Canadians to promote racial harmony and to preserve the history of Indo-Canadian people in Canada. They have approached me regarding the funding for a historic and educational video on the incident, which will be distributed to schools and libraries to ensure the widest possible audience. This project will truly enable us to learn from the past and to make contributions to our understanding of society today. I believe that this will provide the best possible memorial, and assistance will be made available to the foundation for this project.

"Finally, I would like to assure the member from Vancouver Centre" — and the member for Esquimalt-Port Renfrew — that "I personally regard this issue as being of the highest importance. How we adjust to the changing composition of our society will have more to do with our success in the twenty-first century than free trade or any other issue before us."

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just before I recognize the member for Esquimalt-Port Renfrew, I would like to tell you all that when I sit up here and listen to what is said from both sides very carefully, I think — and I

suggest this to all hon. members — that with the best of motives from both sides we have embarked on a very rocky road. I find that emotion is entering into the debate as opposed to reason, and that things can be said, could be said or maybe have been said that are really not appropriate. I think this whole matter has been very well canvassed.

The member for Esquimalt-Port Renfrew has made a great many points. He has been responded to by the Premier and by the minister. I do believe that this is the time when we should move on to another subject or when members should be prepared to speak on something else. If there are those here who are not prepared to speak on anything but the subject we have just covered for maybe the last hour and 20 minutes, I think they should remain in their seats.

MR. SIHOTA: I hope the Premier is not about to leave this debate, in light of the comments he's just made. In the course of his comments....

HON. MR. BRUMMET: What a bunch of garbage!

MR. SIHOTA: The Minister of Education calls this debate a bunch of garbage.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Obviously the members didn't hear what I just said. I don't want to repeat it. Would the member like to proceed, through the Chair.

MR. SIHOTA: In his comments the Premier referred to this as a tolerant and understanding province; I agree with that. My regret is that this does not appear to be a tolerant and understanding government. The essence of understanding....

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, we're getting right back into the subject that I suggested had been well canvassed. Has the member got something else he would like to debate?

MR. SIHOTA: I intend to debate this issue, because the minister and the Premier made comments in light of the comments I just made, Mr. Chairman. I think it's my right as a member of this House to stand up and respond to what they had to say.

Interjection.

MR. SIHOTA: I don't think I should be foreclosed upon in terms of my right in this chamber to deal with this very significant issue.

My regret is that this does not appear to be a tolerant and understanding government.

HON. MR. VEITCH: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, I realize that the member is relatively new to this House, but there are rules of debate in this House and in every parliament that are time-honoured and time-tested. The Chairman has made an appeal to all hon. members of this House. It is the duty of each and every member to obey the direction of the Chairman.

I am sorry, Mr. Chairman, but this member is continually flaunting those rules, and I would ask that you bring him to order.

MR. CLARK: It seems to me that the Chairman has made a suggestion, and we will attempt to follow that suggestion; but he has not yet made a ruling. There are, it seems to me, issues arising from the minister's previous statement on the government's position on the *Komagata Maru* that are quite appropriate for us to continue to pursue. In fact, Mr. Chairman, I might say that what we've seen exhibited on the government side demonstrates the very point we've been trying to make: the government's commitment to multiculturalism and issues like the *Komagata Maru* is shallow and has no substance.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Chair suggested that we move on to something else, rather than making a ruling, under the impression that all hon. members are honourable, would see the problems involved and would abide by that suggestion. If you're not prepared to abide by that suggestion, then the Chair will have to make a ruling.

I believe that the subject has been very well canvassed. It's just going to keep on. If the Chair recognizes someone on this side of the House, they will speak, and then naturally someone from the other side of the House will want to speak. I know I'm being repetitive, but I've listened to this debate very carefully and have heard everything I believe there is to be said. So I will now rule that we will move on to another subject.

MR. CLARK: On a clarification of the ruling, I wonder if the Chairman is saying.... First of all, I'd like to know on what basis you have decided and what rule you cite in respect to this issue; but more importantly, whether your ruling is restricted to the question of the *Komagata Maru* or deals with the whole question of multiculturalism.

HON. MR. VEITCH: Mr. Chairman, if the hon. member would check the standing orders of this House, he would realize that the ruling of a Chairman or the Speaker is not contestable except by substantive motion. I would ask that you would so inform the member.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Chair hasn't ruled out the discussion of multiculturalism; that's part of the responsibilities of the minister. It's the particular subject we've been dealing with that has been well dealt with. I think we should move on, and I so rule. Under the orders of this House, the ruling of the Chair is not questioned. That's the way it's got to be.

MR. SIHOTA: Mr. Chairman, I take it that the subject of the *Komagata Maru* is now foreclosed upon, as I understand your decision. I am seeking clarification. If I'm correct, I'll move to a different topic. I want to make it very clear from the beginning that

my comments will deal with tolerance and understanding in a multicultural society.

I'll go back to the comments that the Premier just made about tolerance and understanding.

Interjection.

MR. SIHOTA: The minister groans. I intend to talk about this issue. I regret that this government has not shown any tolerance and understanding. The Premier's comments simply serve to reinforce that fact.

MR. R. FRASER: You're absolutely wrong.

MR. SIHOTA: We on this side of the House used an example; there are others. The member for Vancouver South made ill-timed and unfortunate comments that had an effect on the Chinese community in this province, dealing with his desire to...

HON. MR. VEITCH: On a point of order, it's the estimates for the Provincial Secretary and Minister of Tourism that are being debated here today. Character assassination is never in order in this House, and I would ask you, Mr. Chairman, to tell the hon. member which estimates we are debating. It's not the estimates of the first member for Vancouver South.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would remind the hon. member, before he proceeds, that we also have a very important rule in this House about personal allusions, and we might take that into consideration.

Let me just tell you one other thing about the rules by which this House operates. The House imposed the rules upon itself, and they have been developed over countless years through the joint efforts of members of both sides. The rules are not imposed by the Chair; all the Chair endeavours to do is to see that the rules imposed upon the House by itself are obeyed. That's all the Chair is trying to do now.

[3:45]

If the member for Esquimalt-Port Renfrew would like to continue, we are dealing with vote 70, the Minister of Tourism and Provincial Secretary, multiculturalism.

MR. SIHOTA: A tolerant and understanding government as it relates to multicultural issues would favour the establishment in the province of a strong and meaningful human rights commission. We don't have that in British Columbia. We haven't seen this government take any steps to strengthen the human rights commission in British Columbia. I didn't hear a peep from the minister on it.

In light of what's happening in the streets of B.C. today, a tolerant and understanding government would have an effective race relations program. That's lacking in British Columbia. A tolerant and understanding minister of multiculturalism would be quick to censure the type of comments that the first member for Vancouver South (Mr. R. Fraser) made with respect to the Chinese community.

A tolerant and understanding government would go out of its way to provide ethnic communities in this province with some comfort on the things that have happened in the past, be it the Chinese head tax, the Japanese internment or the *Komagata Maru* incident — any one of those. A tolerant and understanding government would pay attention to those needs. A tolerant and understanding Premier would understand the significance in a multicultural society of events like the Japanese internment, the *Komagata Maru* and the Chinese head tax. A tolerant and understanding Premier would be supportive...

HON. MR. VEITCH: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, you suggested, you ruled, and you explained your ruling. This member is continually abusing the rules of this House, and by so doing he offends all members. I would ask, Mr. Chairman, that you enforce your ruling.

MR. HARCOURT: Mr. Chairman, the member for Esquimalt-Port Renfrew has accepted your ruling. He is now speaking about the broad issue of what a government that was committed to the concept of multiculturalism would do. He has accepted your position that we have canvassed the issue that you ruled on. We are now looking at the broader issue, not that of the *Komagata Maru* but of what a proper multicultural policy would be in this province. It is clear from his remarks that he is referring to a number of other instances in the past in this province that we should remember.

I'm not quite sure what the Minister of Regional Economic Development's original ministry is trying to get across here. We have accepted your ruling and moved on to the broader issue of multiculturalism. If they are going to continually get up and bring up these points of order and interrupt this debate, that is again stalling and stonewalling and affecting the temper of this debate.

MR. G. HANSON: I am very distressed at what is occurring here today. The tradition in this house when we're discussing a minister's own office estimates is that there is latitude in those discussions. Even philosophical discussions can occur under this particular vote. That has been the tradition of this House. What these new political ministers on that side of the House appear to be doing is shifting it to almost committee stage of legislation.

I haven't heard that member from Esquimalt say anything that was out of order. He's perfectly within his rights to discuss race relations under this particular minister's vote. That minister has a responsibility for policy with respect to the various races that exist within this province. It is entirely appropriate that members on this side of the House can comment on the effectiveness or lack thereof of his performance. We should not be subjected to political interference by the political ministers. Let the line minister, who has the responsibility for these things, look after it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, if there's one thing that has been allowed during the debate on vote 70, it has been latitude — probably more than enough latitude. Everyone seems to be well aware of the ruling I made. The point is being missed with respect to the debate from the member for Esquimalt-Port Renfrew: there is no question that the vote under discussion includes multiculturalism, and therefore that subject is open to debate in the conduct of these estimates.

However, I just repeat once again that allusions to other members of the House is not permitted and is not germane to the discussion, because it's against the rules.

I would like to read one thing that I've read to the House before. It is from Sir Erskine May on page 429 of his nineteenth edition and refers to allegations against members. You've all heard this; you probably know it almost by heart; I know I do. It says: "Good temper and moderation are the characteristics of parliamentary language. Parliamentary language is never more desirable than when a member is canvassing the opinions and conduct of his opponents in debate."

Having said that, we'll continue.

HON. MR. REID: I want to make it abundantly clear that this government has put in place a committee of 24 well-respected, cross-ethnic, cross-cultural representatives. They report back to me, my ministry, my staff, with the representatives and with the cabinet committee in relation to the issues which you continue to canvass. I want to make it abundantly clear to that member, because he doesn't seem to hear it, that this government is an open government and we deal with the concerns and the recommendations and the issues that come from this well-respected committee we have put in place.

[Mr. Rogers in the chair.]

If the member would like, I will read the names of the members and their total responsibility to the community and what they represent. I think it's appropriate at this time to continue to remind those members on the opposite side of the House that this government does care and has put in place an advisory committee representing the whole spectrum of the multicultural component of the province and every region throughout the province, on a fair and equitable basis, as best possible, across cultural and ethnic bounds.

That's the process of which my ministry bases its estimates and its funding towards the estimates, and it is towards advice and consideration of questions raised by the Advisory Committee on Cultural Heritage.

MR. SIHOTA: In terms of the comments that the Chairman before you made, I haven't raised my voice once in this thing. I have been trying to be fairly temperate in my comments. I think it's important to recognize that in terms of multicultural policy this

government has been a failure. Its multicultural policy is not a policy that exemplifies or in any way meets the essence of tolerance and understanding.

The debate today exposes the extent to which this government simply does not understand the needs of ethnic communities. It doesn't understand that there are events in history which would affront ethnic communities in this province — as you, Mr. Chairman, properly noted in your introduction on May 23, 1989, in this House, and I give you credit for that. The rest of this government does not seem to understand that there are times in the history of ethnic communities in this province, days which we remember, tragic days in this country, that ought to be recognized and vowed never to be repeated. An understanding government would go out of its way to show that things have changed.

Earlier on today I read into the record part of Mr. Palmer's column, which I think again exposes what the multicultural policy of this government is all about. A report, which we paid \$18,000 for, talks about the ethnic vote and how it can affect 16 swing seats in Vancouver. You're concerned about that kind of stuff, but when it comes down to the concerns that grip multicultural communities in this province, there's nothing there.

There's nothing in terms of second language. Take a look at what Ontario is offering in terms of second language. There's nothing in terms of human rights or meaningful legislation. Take a look at what Manitoba, Ontario and the federal government have offered in that regard. There's nothing in terms of race relation programs. Take a look at what's happening in Vancouver, and consider that the Civil Rights Protection Act in British Columbia, which is designed in part to deal with race relations, still has never been employed despite what my colleague from Vancouver East raised with respect to the Aryan Nations issue. It has never been employed. A tolerant and understanding government would do that.

A tolerant and understanding government — if I may say as an aside — would remove an Attorney-General who says that he would not have supported a Charter of Rights that gives people basic equality rights. A tolerant and understanding policy on multiculturalism would recognize. . . .

Interjection.

MR. SIHOTA: The Premier says he's bored by this debate.

Interjection.

MR. SIHOTA: He says I'm getting boring.

HON. MR. VANDER ZALM: Let's get to the point.

MR. SIHOTA: The point is that you do not have a tolerant and understanding multicultural policy here in British Columbia. A tolerant and understanding government would be prepared to bring in all of those ancillary programs that ethnic communities in

this province literally for years have cried out about. I don't want to go over the record and enumerate each one of them, as my colleague from Vancouver Centre did.

I see the Premier now telling all of his colleagues: "Let's go. Let's get out of here." He doesn't want to listen to all of this. He says that it's a waste listening to me. Let *Hansard* record that. The Premier feels a sting that this stuff will be mailed out. I want to give the Premier assurance before he leaves that I'll mail out verbatim his comments as well as mine and all of the debate that's gone on today. You'll hear about it, Mr. Premier.

HON. MR. VANDER ZALM: What are you trying to stir up?

MR. SIHOTA: I'm not trying to stir up anything. I'm letting people read the record and come to their own conclusions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, please. *Hansard* is trying to record it. You're making my job difficult and making their job more difficult. Just the member who is identified to speak at this time, please.

MR. SIHOTA: If the Premier wants to respond, he has a chance to respond. Let *Hansard* record what's been said today, and let ethnic communities across the province and in particular the Indo-Canadian community make its own judgment, because I have enough faith that they will make the appropriate judgment on what's been said today by the Premier and by his colleagues in cabinet.

[4:00]

HON. MR. REID: Mr. Chairman, it's probably timely that I read into the record the statement of principles and objectives of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Heritage, so that the record, when it's circulated by members of all sides of this House, circulating it to all the communities of the province of British Columbia. . . . This is the advisory committee — a very selective group of hard-working, cross-cultural community representatives.

"The people of British Columbia have a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Pride in this heritage, in an atmosphere of mutual respect and harmony, strengthens our province and enriches all of us. Through a better understanding and a greater awareness of our origins and our identities, we can better understand what it means to be a Canadian and a British Columbian.

"The objectives of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Heritage are to encourage groups and individuals of all backgrounds to fully participate in the mainstream of Canadian and British Columbia society; encourage all groups and individuals to preserve and share their traditions, to express their cultural heritage; foster a spirit of acceptance, tolerance and understanding of cross-cultural differences; promote cross-cultural harmony while working towards elimination of racism, discrimination and prejudice in our province; support the principles of equitable access to public services and opportunities by all British

Columbians; recognize and encourage volunteers and voluntary community organizations working to preserve and develop our cultural heritage; to promote the enhancement of artistic, historical and language resources by multicultural groups in British Columbia; and encourage the Cabinet Committee on Cultural Heritage to formulate a multicultural policy for the province."

The mandate of this organization:

"The province of British Columbia has recognized the importance of cultural heritage issues through the establishment of a cabinet committee. The Cabinet Committee on Cultural Heritage brings together a broad spectrum of key ministers and is a means of providing leadership and policy direction to government on ethnocultural issues. The cabinet committee has established the Advisory Committee on Cultural Heritage to provide a broadly based forum to receive input from the cultural communities, to develop advice to the cabinet committee based on a regular review of issues of significance to the ethnocultural communities" — would the record please show that the member who raised this issue consistently is not paying attention while the mandate and the objectives of the committee are being reviewed — "and report to the cabinet committee advising government on its policies and programs which affect the ethnocultural communities and recommends initiatives that should be undertaken.

"The advisory committee on cultural heritage is made up of knowledgeable individuals broadly reflecting the province's regions and cultural composition. Its overall goal is to enhance and improve multiculturalism in British Columbia."

MRS. BOONE: Given the mandate that he just read out, I'd like to ask the minister a straightforward question on this. Has his ministry or anybody from your committee made any representation to the Ministry of Health's senior advisory group that is currently travelling around the province? There has been a significant amount of information raised in my region regarding multicultural seniors who come from different backgrounds and have tremendous problems, in terms of their cultural differences and how they relate to various services for seniors — be it in health issues or in terms of getting pensions. They often have language difficulties as well. There has been a good paper put out by the federal government which addresses many of these issues.

My concern is that the Ministry of Health has not — from the information from my region — had any contact with anybody from the multicultural community on that issue. This is really of great importance, because if we're going to be formulating policies around seniors, we ought to be formulating policies that also take into account the concerns of seniors who are having a lot of difficult problems. They are unique problems. When a senior has to talk about an illness and is unable to do so, or when they are perhaps culturally different and don't feel proper talking to a male doctor — for example, if they're female from a multicultural society.

Some of the things recommended have been in terms of providing some translators, making some moves to hire people at local levels to assist them and

Premier brought ugly tone to debate

VICTORIA

THE QUESTION before the legislature was a simple one. Should B.C. put up a memorial to the episode 75 years ago when a shipload of people was detained two months in appalling conditions in Vancouver harbor?

It was not a partisan question. Socred Stephen Rogers spoke eloquently about the so-called Komagata Maru incident last month, calling it "a day of national and provincial disgrace." New Democrats have been persistent but polite in urging a memorial to that dark day.

But a debate on the Komagata Maru memorial turned bitterly partisan Tuesday afternoon in the legislature and, before it ended, things had gotten quite ugly.

New Democrat Moe Sihota began by asking whether the government would reconsider its earlier stand against funding the memorial: "It is not a very expensive request, but it is a significant and meaningful one." Bill Reid, the cabinet minister in charge of multiculturalism, indicated there would be no change and Mr. Sihota turned up the heat: "This is one issue about which every individual of Indo-Canadian persuasion feels passionately about."

Provoked by Mr. Sihota's comments, Premier Bill Vander Zalm entered the debate: "For that member to stand up and suggest that something that happened before any of us in the house here were born is an event that we must, as people here today, somehow assume responsibility for, I would suggest is an insult and simply an attempt by that member to make politics out of a very serious issue. . . . I would suggest that you're using your position, your heritage and this assembly abusively."



His heritage. Yes, as many people are aware, Mr. Sihota is an Indo-Canadian, a member of the same race as those poor people on the Komagata Maru.

The premier wasn't finished making racial allusions. He was quite familiar with the Indo-Canadian community, he told the legislature, and it wasn't like "them" to be asking for a government hand-out: "They are a wonderfully hard-working independent people who do not turn to government at every turn. . . . That's why I don't believe the majority of them are NDP, frankly, I think very few are, only a few lost ones. . . maybe Mr. Member you should consider setting the example by contributing personally and asking others to do likewise."

Mr. Sihota tried to maintain his control — "Does the premier understand that he and I can't change history, but that he and I can show that we have learned from the lessons of history?" — but he was shaken by the accusation that he was motivated by race, not reason.

The Socreds weren't helping cool things down. Cabinet minister Elwood Veitch: "Where's your muck rake?" Cabinet minister Tony Brummet: "You're trying to make it into a racist issue." The premier again: "Are you part of this harmony that B.C. and Canada

is noted for, or are you simply attempting to incite a little bit of friction among the various cultural groups in this province?"

By this point the chairman of the debate, deputy speaker Austin Pelton, was practically begging the members to stop: "I think that with the best of motives from both sides we have embarked on a very rocky road. . . things can be said, could be said, or maybe have been said that are really not appropriate."

Unfortunately neither side heeded the warning, and the debate continued in an intemperate vein for another half hour.

Neither the Socreds nor the New Democrats distinguished themselves Tuesday afternoon, but Bill Vander Zalm bears a special responsibility for the ugly tone. He, the premier, the representative of us all, brought up the subject of race.

Mr. Sihota is, indeed, an Indo-Canadian, the first to be elected to a legislature in this country. The fact of his race has often been pointed to with pride, but no one has ever accused Mr. Sihota of being motivated by race. No member of the legislature has even mentioned his race in a negative way. No one has been willing to stoop that low. Until now. □

Premier's outburst: protesting too much

There are times when Premier Bill Vander Zalm's patterns of reasoning are truly breathtaking . . . breathtakingly illogical, that is.

Take his reaction to New Democrat MLA Moe Sihota's request for funding for a plaque to commemorate the Komagata Maru incident 75 years ago.

The Komagata entered Vancouver harbor in April 1914 with 376 Punjabis aboard. After being held in the harbor for two months, the ship was sent back to India, where 20 of the passengers were killed.

In January of this year, the government turned down a request from the Khalsa Diwan Society for \$2,000 towards the cost of a plaque; this week, Sihota was merely asking Tourism Minister and Provincial Secretary Bill Reid, on behalf of the society, to reconsider the decision.

On Tuesday, Reid, the minister responsible for multiculturalism, ignored Sihota's repeated questions.

Enter the premier, who insistently exhorted Reid to say something: "Take exception to that, take exception to that."

Reid finally got to his feet, only to say he would await the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Heritage before making any funding decision.

What followed then was a remarkable exchange in which Vander Zalm accused Sihota of, among other things, "trying to incite ill will from that community against the government."

"I would suggest that you're using your position, your heritage and this assembly abusively," the premier said. "Are you simply attempting to incite a little bit of friction among the various culture groups in the province?"

Until Vander Zalm's regrettable outburst, the only racism under discussion involved an incident in Vancouver Harbor 75 years ago. But in trying to identify racism where there wasn't any, the premier laid bare his own inadequate grasp of the racism problem in B.C.

To his everlasting credit, Sihota, at first stunned by Vander Zalm's attack, held his temper in check. However, he did allow himself a parting shot at the premier: "I think he's totally out of touch with reality."

On the subject of racism, that claim seems valid.

JIM HUME

Talk politics

MOE SIHOTA, the first Indo-Canadian ever elected to the B.C. Legislature, has been trying to persuade the provincial government to officially recognize the injustice of what is known as the Komagata Maru incident of 75 years ago.

His simple request, made first a couple of weeks ago and repeated this week, touched off an incredibly bitter debate on racism, with angry denunciations hurled back and forth across the house. The debate, lasting close to 90 minutes, also provided some amazing flights of "logic" and concluded with everybody so spitting mad at each other that they failed, or refused, to acknowledge they were in basic agreement on the issue.

Maybe I'd better start at the beginning with Sihota asking Tourism Minister and Provincial Secretary Bill Reid if he would consider some kind of memorial to commemorate Komagata Maru incident.

Reid said he was not and would not.

So a couple of days ago Sihota tried again, asking Reid if he would reverse his earlier decision.

Reid's immediate response was a totally meaningless speech about his advisory committee on cultural heritage and who belonged to it.

He was followed by Premier Vander Zalm who, to the astonishment of all, launched into a vehement and largely incoherent argument that today's generation of politicians could not be held responsible for the actions of politicians 75 years ago.

No one had even hinted at responsibility, but that didn't deter the premier.

He said Sihota was insulting the legislature and attempting "to make politics out of a very serious issue. We all regret what happened 75 years ago, but no one here was born at the time and had any control or can today correct what occurred 75 years ago."

I've searched Hansard carefully and the only thing I can find Sihota asking for is a memorial of some kind telling the Komagata Maru story to remind us of how far we've come since those harsh, uncompromising, racist days.

Emery Barnes chided the premier for being at his sanctimonious best, but failed to rebuke him for his wild-eyed misinterpretation of Sihota's modest request.

The premier, after mulling things over for a few minutes, got to his feet again, this time to suggest that if Sihota and Barnes wanted a memorial to the Komagata Maru incident, they should take up public subscriptions and start with a few dollars of their own. He said he'd donate if they asked him.

Sihota held tight on his emotions: "I am going to be very measured in my response because my gut is telling me to respond in a totally different way..." He then repeated his earlier argument that he was not attaching blame but merely seeking acknowledgement of "lessons learned from history."

Vander Zalm said Sihota was trying to stir up ill feelings and inciting racial hatred. "Let's talk about the good things that are happening today," he urged and forget our yesterdays because we are now "the kindest, most tolerable (sic) the most charitable people anywhere in the world..."

It was syrup at its sticky worst and did nothing to soften the mood of the house, a mood so steeped in bitterness that when Reid did a 180-degree turn, nobody, including Reid himself, appeared to notice.

Here it is, trimmed a little but basically verbatim: "I've been asked whether the province is planning any memorial to the Komagata Maru incident and I've indicated that we are not planning a memorial.

"I believe the initiative should not be from the government but from the community as a whole... The Komagata Maru Foundation of Canada... has approached me regarding the funding for a historical and educational video on the incident, which will be distributed to schools and libraries to ensure the widest possible audience. The project will truly enable us to learn from the past and to make contributions to our understanding of society today. I believe that this will provide the best possible memorial, and assistance will be made available to the foundation for this project... I personally regard this issue as being of the highest importance..."

You may wonder why Reid didn't make an upbeat statement like that when the question was first asked. You may also wonder why, even after the statement, debate on the Komagata Maru raged on for 10 more bitter minutes before it slowly dawned on the participants that they were actually agreeing with each other.

Summer madness is coming early this year.