

Phil Ryan

Professor, School of Public Policy and Administration, Carleton University

Multiculturalism and Extremism? Four Questions

After organizer Inderjit Bains warned Liberal MP Ujjal Dosanjh to bring his “own security” if he dared to attend a Sikh parade in Surrey B.C., Mr. Dosanjh declared that “political correctness” and a “completely distorted” understanding of multiculturalism were permitting the emergence of Sikh extremism. Subsequent media commentary also pointed to a riot at a Sikh temple in Brampton, Ontario as a worrisome sign. Like most Canadians, I possess little reliable knowledge concerning the range of political views within Canada’s Sikh community, but I will offer a few questions to encourage reflection on the possible relation of multiculturalism and extremism.

1. When right-wing U.S. Senator Jesse Helms told President Clinton that “He’d better have a bodyguard” if he dared to visit North Carolina, or when Sarah Palin’s handlers issued a map using rifle crosshairs to identify Congressional Democrats they hope to defeat, did this manifest their lack of understanding of “American values”? Or was it the product of simple political thuggery?
2. When the supporters of Helms and Palin failed to protest their violent rhetoric, was this because they are cowed by political correctness? Or did it reflect an almost universal tendency for people to excuse the excesses of those with whom they politically agree?
3. When Montreal Canadians’ fans riot after a playoff victory, is this because multiculturalism has obliterated their adherence to “core Canadian values”?
4. In short, when things happen in an ethnic minority community that also occur elsewhere, why are we so certain that multiculturalism is to blame in one case, when it cannot conceivably be responsible for the other?”

Phil Ryan is author of *Multicultiphobia* (University of Toronto Press, 2010).