

Sikh name change supports hated caste system

The report "Sikhs outraged at name changes" gives the false impression that the use of Singh and Kaur as a last name has been prohibited altogether.

The Canadian High Commission in New Delhi, in fact, suggests that the use of Singh and Kaur as a last name is not sufficient for the purpose of immigration to Canada.

Applicants have been advised by the New Delhi visa office to add a family name or surname to the existing name that ends with Singh or Kaur.

In India, as in the western world, there is no set pattern of use of the first, middle and last name. The family name, which is usually the surname of an individual, invariably points to a caste in Indian society.

Sikhism, as a religion, has endeavoured to uproot the caste system by giving common names, like Singh and Kaur, to all its followers. Adhering to the tenets of their religion, Sikhs with progressive outlooks normally don't use family names that point toward a caste.

Surely the intention of Canada's visa office in New Delhi is not to perpetuate the hated caste system. Yet the requirement to add a surname linked to it will serve this very purpose.

As no one has been asked to drop Singh or Kaur from their given name, there is no question of hurting Sikh sentiments.

The real issue is the adding of a caste-based surname and the propriety of forcing a person to change his or her name in order to be considered eligible to emigrate to Canada.

Ragbir Singh Sirjana, Delta

Potential for disaster

I work in a very busy laboratory at a hospital in Squamish, which has a large East Indian population.

Many of the names, including the first, middle and last, are the same and are gender-neutral.

I once called a person in for lab tests and had three people stand up, male and female.

Because they don't use their birth dates as identification and very few speak English well enough to give us a correct ID, the chances of doing the wrong



Hardev Singh Chahal (left) and son Jatinder Singh Chahal lead Sikhs down Vancouver's Main Street in the annual celebration of Baisakhi. Controversy has arisen over the similarity of Sikh names.

RIC ERNST — PROVINCE FILE PHOTO

test on someone is frightening.

I can understand how Sikhs must feel to be requested to change their names. But they must understand that it can be necessary for their own safety.

Pennie McNutt, Squamish

Government ignorance

It seems the proposed policy over changing Sikh names doesn't come from a concern over applicant mix-ups, but rather from a common political policy of pure ignorance.

There are many reasonable methods to address concerns over mix-ups. I don't recall this attitude being directed toward Smith, Jones, Brown and Wang.

This is a very sad position to take in today's world.

Robert Randall, Richmond

Public relations disaster

I strongly support CUPE in its bid to get a good contract, but I'm surprised it criticizes those who volunteered to clean the beach.

Paid or not, this public act of kindness is a PR battle that the union can't win — so why bother?

The union already has Vancouver Mayor Sam Sullivan on the ropes. To alienate the public over picking up trash is poor thinking, terrible PR and only gives Sullivan more ammo to use against CUPE.

Just watch — for the rest of the fireworks, there will be even more volunteers picking up garbage.

Union: Don't stick your other foot in your mouth. Go after Sam and not these good samaritans.

Ken Hamaguchi, Richmond

Focus on a fair deal

Whether these replacement workers, so-called "volunteers," were paid or not to do other people's work is immaterial, because Houston Landscapes was given a nice bit of front-page advertising.

Kent Houston is either a "socially responsible citizen" or a "scab." I lean toward the latter.

But this is just a distraction. The fact remains that "Sam's Strike" never should have happened.

The mayor and the city council have been lapdogs to the GVRD labour-relations board, which has slowed the whole process and asked for concessions no group of employees would agree to.

It is time for the city to deliver a fair deal and get this summer back on track for its citizens.

Zheng Dao Wang, Vancouver

Selfish union stance

My God, how spiteful and selfish can this union be?

Despite knowing that there is a garbage strike on, many of the fireworks attendees couldn't have cared less what kind of mess they left behind.

These volunteers came out on their own, early in the morning to boot, and made this city a cleaner, safer, more beautiful place for the rest of us and for those tourists who add so much to our economy.

I guess the union would rather everyone wallow in the garbage. What a pretty image that is!

To the volunteers: Good on you and thank you very much.

Sonja Velt, North Vancouver

Shameful approach

Shame on Mike Jackson of CUPE, Aaron Jasper of the West End Residents Association and letter writer Glen Hansman.

We're all citizens of Vancouver, union and non-union, and we all should be picking up garbage, not only during the Celebration of Light but during our daily lives.

Keeping our city clean has nothing to do with the present labour dispute.

If we want to be considered a world-class city, we all have to step up to the plate every day.

Gentlemen, wake up and smell the roses that aren't under the pile of garbage — that would still be on the street, if people took your approach to keeping the city clean.

Juri Raiska, North Vancouver

Impediment to society

Sign me up!

I never thought I would volunteer to pick up other people's garbage. But if CUPE local president Mike Jackson thinks it's wrong for citizens to pitch in and keep our beaches clean, then I would like to offer my services.

Sadly, the real issue here is how the unions have become completely outdated vehicles that operate only as an impediment to a productive and functioning society.

And the irony is that organized labour does not realize how ridiculous its endless complaining sounds to the rest of us.

Beth Hardy, Vancouver