



THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE  
Executive Director

Science A 147  
2500 University Drive N.W.  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2N 1N4  
Telephone (403) 220-7700  
Facsimile (403) 289-0171  
Telex 03821545

April 15, 1994

Constable Baltej S. Dhillon  
Quesnel Detachment  
R.C.M.P.  
584 Carson Avenue  
Quesnel, B.C.  
V2J 2B5

Dear Baltej,

You will find attached for your information an article which appeared today in the Calgary Herald. I thought you might be interested in it.

I also wanted to say that it was a pleasure meeting you during your recent visit to Calgary. Your visit to the University to meet with a few people here was particularly appreciated.

Please accept my very best wishes for your career and for the future. The Force is very fortunate to have you within its ranks.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely

Bill Warden

# The man is making a difference

## OPINION



**BILL  
WARDEN**

Freelance columnist

**A** well-known Mountie rode into our town recently. His boss, the detachment commander in Quesnel, B.C., suggested that he keep his head down.

He had a good reason. The Mountie was Const. Baltej Singh Dhillon, the first and — to date — only member of the RCMP to wear a turban.

His visit was to Alberta and to Calgary. The Alberta where yesterday's red-coated men from Lethbridge collected no less than \$100,000 in the middle of a deep recession to try to run Const. Dhillon out of the force.

The Calgary where apostles of intolerance took the lead in signing up 200,000 people to try to get Parliament to do the same thing.

It's not surprising then that his commander gave him a few words of advice.

It doesn't seem to matter that police forces around the world — London, Toronto, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and many more — permit the turban.

It doesn't seem to matter that Sikhs and turbans were in Canada long before many of those who, with names and accents betraying their origins, are now creating much of the fuss.

Many Calgarians don't care a hoot if Quebec leaves Confederation. On the contrary. Let them go. But a turban on a Mountie? The patriotic juices begin to flow.

Const. Dhillon did appear in public in Calgary. But he was among friends — some 400 of them — at a gala dinner, resplendent in his uniform — and turban.

He is an outstanding young man. Regardless of what one thinks of the turban, one cannot help but admire a person who is prepared to stand up quietly but unflinchingly for his beliefs. To challenge prejudice and accept without rancor all the abuse and insults hurled his way.

It takes guts. Const. Dhillon has those in spades.

I had the privilege of spending a couple of hours with Const. Dhillon during his visit. Ironically, he embodies all of the virtues which so many Canadians cherish: family values, honesty, integrity, hard work, compassion. His reason for joining the force, he says, was not because he wanted to cause a commotion, but rather because his dream for as long as he can remember was to help people.

Dhillon's presence in the RCMP has a more pragmatic side to it. After the Air India disaster in the mid-'80s in which hundreds of people perished, the force suddenly realized that it had no one in its



**ON THE JOB:** Dhillon poses as a shopper in a B.C. store to catch shoplifters CP file photo

ranks who could talk to the Sikh community in its own language, no one who could gain its confidence, no means to carry out a complete investigation.

Shortly thereafter, the top brass decided to correct the situation and recruiters spread out across the country, looking for first-rate young people from the country's minority communities.

Dhillon was one of those who answered the call.

Not surprisingly, Dhillon and his kin have had to take a lot of heat. Yet the constable talks proudly of the force as "my family," and with pride he points to the fact that the detachment commander selected him to act as community liaison officer.

And, even if Dhillon is tight-lipped on the subject, one suspects that he has had his share of problems within the force itself.

If regular recruits had to run hard, Dhillon had to run twice as hard. If regular police officers have to stay pure, Dhillon has to be purer than pure. To this day, rumors constantly surface to the effect that he has quit.

Canadians should be thankful to have young people like Dhillon in the RCMP. Would that all our sons and daughters had his fortitude and work ethic and character.

Against this background, the old men the RCMP and the Canadian Legion cut a pathetic figure with their campaign against the turban.

They say they are not racist. Why then do they carry on so angrily about the turban — while saying nary a word when white women joined the force a few years ago and wore a totally different head dress?

Alongside Canadians in the world wars, Sikhs died in the trenches — with their turbans on. One Sikh from Golden, B.C., Hari Singh, voluntarily joined the Expeditionary Force in 1914 and fought as a Canadian.

So why do our Legionnaires — in the name of honoring the dead — dishonor so insensitively their living comrades?

What a sad commentary on the state of our society it is when people come to value a hat more than the inner worth of the individual?

During his visit to Calgary Const. Dhillon met with several groups of young people from the Sikh community. His message: Be good citizens. Be honest, work hard and care for others. A role model for all Canadians to emulate.

(Warden is executive director of the International Centre at the University of Calgary.)