

Anniversary of First Session of Parliament

The fact that the first debate in the first parliament had to do with bilingualism indicates that we could have a similar debate today, and that the problem of finding ways and means by which two great cultures could live together in harmony and unity is still with us. The Greeks have an old saying that the more things change, the more they are the same. The problem which faces Canada today is much the same as the problem of 100 years ago; that is, how those of us who are English speaking and French speaking Canadians can work together to make this the great nation that our forefathers dreamed it might be.

If there is any common purpose which binds us together in this house, irrespective of party, it is the desire for a unified and a vibrant Canada. We hear talk of separatism. I think the talk is much more vociferous than the extent to which that sentiment is shared by Canadians. But I think we have to say, and say it repeatedly, that in the opinion of the great majority of the members of this house any kind of separatism is unthinkable, unnecessary and undesirable.

• (3:10 p.m.)

This parliament, of course, deals with a much larger area and many more regions than did the first parliament. In 1867 Upper and Lower Canada and the two maritime provinces came together in a confederation, but the great western area was untouched. Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland were still outside. British Columbia and the prairie provinces, Prince Edward Island in 1873, and Newfoundland in our own lifetime, joined confederation so that now it stretches from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the forty ninth parallel to the Arctic ocean.

This means that we have more diverse problems, and that we have regional problems which must be recognized and met. One hundred years ago national unity mainly centred on the problem of bilingualism, but today if we are to have national unity the solution of biculturalism by itself will not be sufficient. National unity today must also be founded on equality of opportunity for every citizen in Canada, irrespective of where he or she may live and irrespective of their race, colour or religion. Unless we can provide social and economic opportunity and security for Canadians in every region of this country, we will not be able to build the kind of unified and vital Canada that all of us desire.

One of the problems which faced our forefathers in that first session of the first

parliament was the growing desire for independence, because although in 1867 Canada was to have control of its own affairs it still was tied to a very considerable extent to the apron strings of Whitehall and much of its foreign policy and its military affairs were in the hands of the government of the United Kingdom. Even in the first world war Sir Robert Borden had to fight hard to retain the identity of the Canadian army and to prevent Canadian units from being dispersed throughout the British army. It was not until 60 years after confederation that we got the Statute of Westminster making Canada completely sovereign in its own right.

In this year 1967, the change in economic, trade and investment policies has altered the direction of the threat to our independence. We no longer have to worry about breaking the shackles of colonialism with Great Britain. We are now in danger of becoming an economic satellite of our great neighbour to the south. This poses a new set of problems and demands a new set of solutions. We pride ourselves that we have lived in friendship with our great neighbour to the south and we want to continue to do so. But at the same time, as Canadians we must continue to assert the kind of independence that our forefathers had in mind when confederation was established.

On this important occasion it seems to me this is the time for us to do two things: first, pay tribute to the members of that first parliament, to those men who "saw beyond the lean horizon of their days," and say of them that they built better than they knew; and the second, for us to so conduct ourselves in this parliament that we shall be worthy of those who went before us and earn the gratitude of those who come after us.

[Translation]

Mr. David Lewis (York South): Mr. Speaker, although unfortunately I am not of French Canadian origin, may I be allowed to say a few words in French on behalf of our party.

When we remember the problems with which the members of parliament were faced a hundred years ago, we notice with some surprise that many of them still remain. National unity, bilingualism, equality among the various parts of the country, the true independence of the new nation, all those problems still require our attention and our wisdom. We have made tremendous progress but the basic problem, of human relationship still remains.

[Mr. Douglas.]