

Adjournment Debate

I repeat, the Patriotes and the Reformers were not the sole instigators of the movement towards democracy that started in 1848, but it is important to recognize the part they played, and I will get back to this. We want to give everyone his due.

The causes that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries moved first the Americans, then the French and then the Canadians to rebel violently against authority must be seen in context, and the context was, of course, different for each group. However, the main theme was the same: the will of a mature people to manage its own affairs. This phenomenon was to spread to a number of western countries.

Without going so far as to defend violence, we cannot afford to ignore, for the sake of being politically correct, the important and in some cases unique role played by popular uprisings in the history of democracy.

In Canada as well, history has shown that acts of violence occur only as a last resort, when people try to make themselves heard and all peaceful methods have failed. Perhaps I may recall what was said by the hon. member for Portneuf and emphasize the respectful tone of the resolutions he read to us and the fact that they included the desire to achieve their purpose through legal means. It is only when they realized that legal means were ineffective that they resolved to take arms.

All attempts had failed. There were speeches in the House, demonstrations in the streets, editorials in the newspapers. The Patriotes and the Reformers finally decided to resort to armed rebellion because they had failed to obtain that London limit the discretionary powers of the Governor.

In Canada as everywhere else, violent action, even when defeated, usually brings some movement, even on the part of a previously inflexible government.

It is in this light that the motion seeks recognition of the historic contribution of the rebels of 1837-38, who fought for the democratization of the institutions of the time.

• (1955)

We should not be surprised by the fact that it took so long to realize the significance of the events of 1837-38. By the way, we should remember that the Church took 130 or 140 years before allowing—

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry. If there is unanimous consent, the member can go on, but his time has expired. One minute.

Mr. Mercier: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out, just for the sake of comparison, that although the Bastille was taken on July 14, 1789, it was only 100 years later that the storming of the Bastille became France's national day. The Bastille was taken by Parisians, but, to go back to what my colleague opposite mentioned earlier, in spite of the fact that this was the doing of

Parisians alone, the whole country now commemorates this local event as its national day. This example illustrates why we are asking that these events be recognized.

No matter what the members of this House think of the future of Canada, it seems legitimate for us to look at our past with respect and emotion, to honour this handful of men who, more than a century and a half ago, helped shape our democratic institutions, and sometimes paid for it with their lives.

The Deputy Speaker: The hour provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recently I asked a question of the government, in particular the Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific, concerning the upcoming visit of the Prime Minister and Team Canada, together with nine provincial premiers on a trade delegation to Asia. In particular I focused on the issue of human rights and democracy in Asian countries being visited by the Prime Minister and by the premiers.

In urging the Prime Minister to speak out forcefully with respect to human rights and democracy in China, Tibet, Indonesia and East Timor in particular I want to remind the Prime Minister of his own words in a letter written in December 1991: "Progress toward respecting human rights in much of the world is the direct result of pressure from western democracies".

I think it is rather ironic that the Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific was one of the very eloquent spokespeople for the pro-democracy movement in Canada, calling for democracy and human rights in China. He had a number of confrontations with that government and was one of the key organizers of a human rights delegation in which I had the honour of participating together with two other members of Parliament, including his colleague, the Liberal member for Nepean.

The plea I would make today, reiterating a plea I made earlier, is for the Prime Minister, for the Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific, for the Minister of Foreign Affairs to recognize that the concerns which drove that plea for human rights in 1991 which