

The Late Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker

Mr. Trudeau: He sometimes mentioned to me the loneliness of being the only surviving former prime minister and seemed sincerely keen to have some company. I now know how he felt and sincerely share his keenness.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: It is sad that John Diefenbaker is not here today, Mr. Speaker, and we shall miss him. But just speaking of the impact he made on Canadians and upon this House is a happy tribute to a person who knew the joy and satisfaction of doing what he wanted to do with his life and doing it to the best of his ability. What more could any of us wish as a record of our own ambitions and achievements?

On behalf of the official opposition, I extend our sympathy to the right hon. gentleman's family. They can treasure the memory of his career and take comfort from the rich life which he and Mrs. Diefenbaker enjoyed together.

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I join the Prime Minister (Mr. Clark) and the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Trudeau) in extending deepest sympathy on behalf of our party to the members of John Diefenbaker's family.

Although it goes without saying among members of this House who knew him and saw him in action that John Diefenbaker was an extraordinary parliamentarian, it is also important for those of us who are here and who hope to remain to note that at the same time he was an extraordinary populist in the sense that he never forgot that in a democracy it is essential to maintain the closest possible rapport with the ordinary citizen. He did not forget this at any point in his political life. He was also a notable, tough-minded fighter both against his enemies on the other side of the House and, from time to time, as his colleagues will recall, within his own party when he thought a battle was in order. This, too, is something all of us in political life can learn from the memory of John Diefenbaker—that he fought for what he believed in.

● (1610)

He was a man who had an extraordinary sense that Canada is much more than merely the sum of its regional parts. Although he was not always—perhaps I understate it—precise in his vision of what constituted a greater Canada, there can be no doubt that no Canadian was ever left in any question about his own very real passion on that important subject.

[*Translation*]

Finally, Mr. Diefenbaker was the first head of government who was of neither British nor French extraction. This fact is very important because, like many Canadians, his ancestors came from another part of the world and they played a very important role in the development of our country.

[*English*]

John Diefenbaker will be remembered and missed by Canadians in every part of our land.

[Mr. Trudeau.]

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I should like to join with the head of the government, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Trudeau), as well as with the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent) in paying tribute to this great Canadian. My leader, the hon. member for Beauce (Mr. Roy), would have liked very much to do it himself, but being a newcomer to this House he did not have the privilege to know as well as I did this great Canadian, Mr. John G. Diefenbaker. It is therefore a great honour for me to pay a posthumous tribute to this great Canadian.

I had the pleasure of meeting him in Quebec City on one of his visits there as a member of Parliament. He gave a lecture at the Chateau Frontenac and as it was open to the public, I went to hear him. I was curious to meet this fellow, if I may use this expression with reference to him, who had a bad reputation in the province of Quebec. He was reported to be hostile to French Canadians. Later on, after getting acquainted with his views and his intentions, I soon realized that this Canadian loved his country, every part of his country.

He was defeated several times prior to being elected on March 26, 1940. That shows that he was a great fighter. Some of us were defeated more than once before being elected. That does not make us any the worse for it, but it does give us many more ideas and more determination to keep on forging ahead.

Mr. Speaker, for 11 years I had the good fortune of knowing him, as we all did, at least those of us who spent those 11 years here and, as the Leader of the Opposition said a while ago, his repartees afforded us truly enjoyable moments even while working hard in this Parliament and fighting for our respective stands. I should like to remind the House that it was under his administration that we were given simultaneous interpretation, a means of unity in this country. I consider it an essential tool in drawing us all closer to one another. I wanted to stress that. I should also like to remind this House that he set an excellent example by his attendance in this House. When he was in top shape, he came to the House regularly, taking part in the debates and respecting the opinions of others while fighting very courageously for all of his own.

I remember, among other things, that he occasionally held views that differed from those of the members of his own party but that, because of his convictions, he defended his own.

He loved Parliament and he used to call it "this democratic institution". I think that taking our inspiration from his convictions and his courage, we should love this institution and work together at giving our country the best administration possible. On behalf of my party, I should like to extend my sincere condolences to his family. We shall long keep his memory.