

Private Members' Business

touring this country to elicit views on our constitutional options. This direct involvement of the Canadian people was a sound course of action by our Prime Minister and a very wise course for the times. Yet, is not the real need of this country what I like to call a defence of Confederation? That does not imply an unchanged constitutional framework. We must change and adapt.

We must show our genius for compromise where and when it most matters, but we must enter discussion of change with a real perspective. It would be fatal if our national dialogue consisted only in scoring debating points or indulging in put downs. Instead we should be examining what we have really accomplished together and how we did it.

What are our strengths that made this one of the most envied countries in the world? This is a defence in depth. This is the real preparation for a sound change in the future. How do we accomplish this? We invite our fellow Canadians by one means and another to use the past as a learning tool for the future, and the past does not mean dry history lessons. It means understanding our roots, the contributions of the many cultures who enriched our mosaic, the contributions of our native peoples, the differences that we can see between the way we run our country and our community and the way that others run theirs, all in a spirit of active and responsible citizenship. When we do this, we shall find mistakes that we have made, but the more we examine our common heritage the more likely we are to be impressed by the positive side of our story.

We shall better understand our accomplishments in creating unity, excellence and human satisfaction out of our cherished diversity. Are we asking too much of Heritage Day to do all this? A Heritage Day could be an ideal occasion to focus our thoughts in this way, but it must be for all Canadians. I have no doubt that all the people of Canada would respond and that the media would give great help by their attention to whatever theme or themes of heritage were to be uppermost in a given year.

A Heritage Day for all Canadians would be an ideal occasion because unlike Canada Day, it would come at a time when most of our young people are in school. They would be a very big part of the process of discovering and evaluating our heritage. Their teachers and we, as parents, would be anxious to help them, but I suspect it

would be the young people who would be helping us by turning our minds down channels too long neglected.

I do not know exactly what these young people and the rest of us would do. Consciously or otherwise, we would be searching together for the meaning of heritage. We would be looking more at our roots and perhaps digging up unanswered questions about how we came to be what we are. I think we would get to know one another better and therefore become even more tolerant of those whose legacies and perhaps language are different. That too would be a healthy process.

Is it too late to begin the defence of Confederation? Anyone who believes it is too late portrays a tragic lack of confidence in our future. I have got confidence in the long-term survival of Canada and I believe that the time is always opportune for new means to build its future soundly. The time of national re-examination makes consideration of our heritage especially urgent now.

Perhaps what we are asking is nothing less than a change in the Canadian character. We seem to rejoice in our widespread reputation for modesty, caution and self-effacement. It is a false reputation. For modesty and caution did not build this country. But we and our forbears seem to think that it was rudely boastful to talk about the positive things we have done and are doing. That sort of modesty is a luxury we can ill afford today. We Canadians are still on a voyage of discovery together. We must understand better how we got here before we plot any future course. A heritage day for all Canadians could become one of the single simplest most effective means we could imagine to give our thoughts dimension and perspective.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for presenting this bill. It is important for all Canadians to celebrate our heritage, but I cannot support the concept that designating another paid holiday is the best way to do so.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I note that there is but five minutes left today in this debate, which is unfortunate, because I would have liked to have spoken for a long period of time on this bill. There is a lot to say about the issue of promoting our national heritage and, of course, there is the whole debate that we should entertain as well of whether or not the best way of achieving that is indeed to establish an additional day of holiday.