

*Private Members' Business*

We promised Canadians jobs. In other words bread, not smoke and mirrors. Having said this, I would not want people to misinterpret the importance I attach to the action of our national patriots. I recognize that Papineau and Mackenzie played a significant role in our country's development by precipitating events with their radical position, but I also recognize that Baldwin and Lafontaine together contributed to the progress of democracy with their more moderate position.

That is the great lesson that Canada teaches us. There are sometimes contradictory individual interests and positions. Then transcending everything else there is a peaceful Canada which forms and transforms itself without armed conflict.

I for one am proud to live in a country that adopted responsible government, making the pitchforks and rifles of the past unnecessary. I therefore encourage all Canadians to celebrate in their own way the tradition of democracy they have inherited. As they have shown so often in the past, Canadians do not lack inventiveness.

They can if they wish organize historical re-enactments of the events on the road to responsible government. They can, with the help of local historical societies or heritage conservation groups, organize commemorative or celebratory events. In closing I hope that my comments on opposing this motion have not in any way diminished the events of our history that allow us to speak here.

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Mercier (Blainville—Deux—Montagnes, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the motion of my colleague from Verchères is of particular interest for me because many events of the 1837 Rebellion occurred in my riding, in the town of Saint-Eustache, which became historic, and in neighbouring villages.

● (1945)

It is impossible to visit this region without seeing traces of these events mile after mile. Some of the villages and localities have evocative and significant names. One village was razed and others were burned to a greater of lesser extent. The English burned these villages in reprisal.

The facade of the main church in Saint-Eustache still bears the marks made by English cannonballs. Many streets in the town are named after participants in these events. The Jean-Olivier Chénier Local Community Service Centre recalls the leader of the Patriotes in this region. These are all visible remnants of the 1837 Rebellion which brought the Patriotes face to face with the British army. We who live in that region cannot forget those events even if we wanted to. The signs are there right before us.

Before anything else, I have to dispel a myth which has to do with the confrontation that did not occur because the Patriotes wanted sovereignty. The motion does not mention only the

Patriotes of Lower Canada but also the Reformers of Upper Canada. Let me quote my colleague, the hon. member for Verchères, who presented this motion. He said on June 20, 1994: "The aim of the motion I have just respectfully submitted for the consideration of this House today is to rectify this perception [that they were criminals] and to achieve, at long last, recognition of the historic contribution of the Patriotes of Lower Canada and the Reformers of Upper Canada to the establishment of a truly responsible and truly democratic government in Canada and in Quebec".

At the time, the Patriotes and the Reformers were fighting for a cause that is still dear to our hearts, quite simply democracy.

Therefore, whether they were from Upper or Lower Canada, the insurrectionists were fighting to have the colonial assembly, which represented in the people, take a more active part in the exercise of power and gradually take over the internal management of the colony. As we know, the management of the colony's affairs was, at the time, conducted by London, through the governor and councils.

In short, what the insurrectionists wanted, and the reason why I think the whole country has the duty to recognize them, was, and I repeat, the democratization of the institutions of their country.

Whether it was in the field or at the end of a rope, will we say that the sacrifice of those who lost their lives was in vain? No, because in spite of their defeat, their uprising had the result of drawing the attention of London to the people's aspirations that it had consistently ignored until then. It was as a result of the 1837-38 events that London asked Lord Durham to conduct an inquiry and to propose some solutions to the problems raised by these aspirations from colonies in the north of the United States of America.

● (1950)

The Durham report, which was of course open to criticism in many respects, particularly for us, Quebecers, nevertheless proved the Reformers and the Patriotes right, in the sense that the report ridiculed and criticized the Constitution Act of 1791, which, while giving a representative government, did not accept the principle of responsible government. That was exactly what the insurrectionists had been demanding and, on that point, Lord Durham was in agreement with them.

It would be an overstatement to say that, in and of themselves, the actions of the Patriotes and the Reformers resulted in the Durham mission, the awareness that this mission raised in London and, consequently, the recognition in 1848 of responsible government. It would be unfair to others who helped make our institutions more democratic. The fact remains, however, that this action led to the decision to send Lord Durham on his mission and that the conclusions of this mission strongly influenced London's decision in 1848.