

The Canadian Beaver

tion that the beaver is a Canadian symbol and should be recognized as such.

This leads me to touch briefly upon another question that has been raised in connection with this bill. As is evidenced by my questions and speeches in this House, I recognize and share the concerns of Canadians everywhere about the pressing economic problems we all face. However great these problems may be, I do not agree with some that our search for their solution should automatically exclude discussion of other subjects.

I would submit that a nation's true strength is most tested, and its unity most endangered, when individuals grow fearful of the future because of economic unrest. At such times of stress it is all too easy to become overly introspective, and it is a common human failing to place blame on those nearest at hand.

● (1610)

Immediate concern for economic problems can blind us to our long-term goals and aspirations. The suspicion and mistrust which result can make us forget those greater things we have in common.

It is precisely in such difficult times that Canadians need to be reminded of those things we share, and of those common strengths which will ultimately see us through troubled times.

To an individual, to a nation of individuals, there must be more to life than just financial facts and figures. There must be things to touch one's soul and heart and emotions if we are to be complete persons and a whole nation. That is the importance of symbols, their special importance in times such as ours. That is the object of this bill and the special importance of the beaver to Canadians in our history, today, and for tomorrow.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ian Watson (Laprairie): Madam Speaker, I have no reservations about agreeing with the hon. member who has just spoken that the beaver is a symbol of Canada and has been so for generations. However, I want to put on record one or two points which I believe should be considered before we take any final action on this subject.

The commercial houses of Montreal in particular, until the end of the 19th Century used the beaver on almost everything they could find to print it on. It was a symbol of Montreal, representing all the wealth which Montreal reaped from the fur trade. It meant everything to those who were in control of business in Montreal. After the turn of the Century the use of the beaver as a commercial symbol began to decline throughout Canada. Some had begun to make fun of the emblem. For example, Canadian shipping carried the beaver emblem, and it was commonly referred to around the world as the rat line. This eventually got to people, and Canadians began to back away from the use of the beaver symbol.

I am not saying we should not give the beaver symbol some kind of formal recognition, but we should examine this matter carefully before we take any action. I hope that when the committee does consider the matter it will call in experts who can explain for the benefit of members and the Canadian public the intricacies and mysteries of

[Mr. O'Sullivan.]

heraldry and exactly how we should go about giving formal recognition to the beaver as a symbol of Canada, bearing in mind the things the hon. member would like to achieve.

Mr. Gustave Blouin (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the discussion of this bill to provide for the recognition of the beaver as a symbol of the sovereignty of Canada.

[Translation]

However, Madam Speaker, I must say to this House that when that question was brought to my attention last fall following the introduction of the private bill by a US senator to have the beaver accepted as the emblem of the State of New York I was surprised and even disappointed that we did not have in the statutes of Canada an act to designate the beaver as national emblem.

I was under the impression that because of the use we had made of the beaver as an emblem for a very long time already, the beaver was indeed recognized in the statutes as the emblem of this country, but such is not the case.

We have been talking about the beaver for a very long time. It was even mentioned in great political debates, and I found in the archives of the government of Québec that the Hon. J. A. Chapleau, premier of that province in 1883, was talking at that time about the political group called Les Castors as a rebel political party, and had more specifically in mind the ultraconservatives of that time.

In 1910, Sir Wilfrid Laurier made a speech in Montreal on the Castors calling them people who changed political parties, or even criticized their own party. Indeed, the beaver as an emblem has always been and still is related to our history.

Incidentally, I would like to relate an anecdote. That happened during my first year as a member of this House, in 1963, when I received in Ottawa an Indian delegation from my riding. Outside the Parliament building, after visiting the premises, a member of that delegation remarked: "There are beavers here in Ottawa." He was looking at the top of the door to the Parliament building. Indeed, at the main entrance of that majestic building a beautiful beaver is engraved in the stone.

So, Madam Speaker, as far as I am concerned, I have no objection to referring this bill to committee, and I hope it can then be given detailed consideration.

[English]

Some hon. Members: Question!

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.