

● (1612)

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): By the Secretary of State (Mr. Roberts), for example.

Mr. MacGuigan: I do not think that is the view of the Secretary of State. I think there is simply a reluctance there to proceed at the moment. As for consideration of the question of the work ethic, the notion of the work ethic put forward by the hon. member for Palliser is not mine. My notion is that people should work when they wish to, or when it is their duty, but that they should also have time off. It would not be excessive to have 12 holidays a year rather than the nine or ten presently recognized. Consequently, I have no difficulty with this concept.

There are some who link their opposition to this proposal with our present economic difficulties and they tend to think its adoption would present difficulties for business. Several years ago a survey was made with respect to employees under federal jurisdiction. It showed that most of such employees in Canada already enjoyed more days off than were designated in legislation. That was in 1973. In other words, we are merely establishing a minimum by what we propose to do here because employees are already receiving more days than are prescribed by statute, so the number of holidays will not necessarily increase. At the time of the survey, 95 per cent of employees had nine or more general holidays when only eight were required by legislation. Some 72 per cent had ten holidays, at least two more than legislation at the time required. This is an indication that the business community does recognize that holidays make an essential contribution to work. I hope that once our temporary economic difficulties are over the government will recover its courage and proceed with this bill immediately. I hope this will come about early in the next parliament.

Another type of argument is used—I do not think it is one which will stir the country. There has been a feeling expressed in committee that the government might use its unilateral proclamation power to vary the focal point of the celebration each year, misusing the discretion given to it for its own purposes, and that this would be divisive. It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that a government which attempted to use tactics of that kind would not profit politically by so doing.

On the other hand, it is quite likely that in the mind of the government there is hesitation about accepting such a power on the ground that it is too weighty a responsibility; in the mind of the public it would be taking responsibility for whatever day is established and nobody else would share it. Well, that is a very good argument, it seems to me, in favour of the government's appointing a public committee. It could be a committee of this House or it could be a committee of citizens, or a combination of both, set up to make recommendations as to what the focal point should be each year. I would suggest that this be done on an annual basis, without making too many

Heritage Day

decisions far in advance. This should not arouse selfish instincts because as long as the country and the world continue there will be a succession of opportunities to name a day, and a group which does not get the year it desires recognized in terms of its special hero will still have another opportunity the following year. So it is not a question of the government ever having to say no. The government merely has to say: You have to wait a bit longer until your subject matter is recommended by the advisory committee.

The advantage of having this power of proclamation lies in the opportunity it affords to recognize the richness of our country. Canada is a country with so many cultures that we have been able to adopt an official policy of multiculturalism which states there is no official culture, that the earlier notion that there was such a thing as biculturalism in Canada was a mistaken one, and that while we think about bilingualism we now couple this not with biculturalism but with multiculturalism. We recognize all these cultures and their contribution to the present and the future and, indeed, to the past of our country.

This power of designation by government on the recommendation of public spirited citizens and parliamentarians, coupled with the ability to issue stamps and coins and all the things which would help Canadians to recognize aspects of their life together, seems to me to be an immensely useful one. Even if you look at it from the point of view of historical discoverers, or if you look at it from the point of view of immigrant groups, on however you look at it, there are just so many aspects of our national heritage to be recognized that you can think of a century of subjects to be recognized without having to sit down for more than three or four minutes.

There is no trouble about arriving at aspects of our national life which we want to celebrate. So this power of designating those aspects, of giving a little special recognition to them from time to time, is very important. It could make an enormous contribution to our life as a society. So I would hope that when the government does again embrace this initiative, or if it is prepared to support my bill, the power to designate the aspect of the holiday will be embodied in the legislation.

I just want to say in conclusion that the genesis of this bill suggests that it should not be a matter of partisan strife. There is, I believe, a genuine national consensus on the need for such a holiday. The only real dispute among most ordinary Canadians has to do with when it should be each year. That is a fortunate position for a parliament to be in, to be able to take an initiative which is so generally acceptable to the people, and I urge that this step be taken very soon.

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, I am proud and honoured to follow a fellow Islander, the hon. member who has just spoken, a very distinguished parliamentarian and a one-time opponent of mine in a general election.

Mr. MacGuigan: I would rather forget about that!