

National Centennial Act

which led to the rebuttal we had yesterday from the Leader of the Opposition? I do not want to be put into an extremist position because I have already been attacked by one of the extremists, but I think it is about time we started to level on this question of the relationship between French Canadians and English Canadians.

I am a mountain of prejudice with regard to a great many things, but I think like most people in English speaking Canada think. I do not speak for them but I think like most of them. We want to know more. We want to co-operate, establish liaison and sympathize. But the way things are going now we seem to be continually trapped into keeping our mouths shut while these people go ahead and attack us. I do not feel, and most of the people in my part of the country do not feel, responsible for Maurice Duplessis and what may have developed in Quebec. We do not feel we are responsible for the fact that the premier of Quebec is at the present time objecting to this title and wants this petty little change. But we would like to know more about it. My argument is that the government, in this particular case the minister, has given us a pretty inadequate explanation of changes such as this. I think the minister should be prepared to recognize that it always seems to be a matter of the English speaking Canadians in a sense having to back down or retrench because of these very sensitive co-nationalists of ours.

Mr. Lamontagne: May I ask a question? Does the hon. member know that the correspondence exchanged on this issue was tabled in the house on June 27 and that the whole matter becomes very clear on reading that correspondence?

Mr. Fisher: Yes, I have checked the debate and read the reference to it.

Mr. Pickersgill: Did you read the letters?

Mr. Fisher: Yes. My point in this regard is that here again we have to respond to the demands and to the requests of Quebec and of the French Canadians within this chamber. I think the matter should have been handled at an earlier time than this, and I do not like to see a government, and an administration which it has created, attacked on the basis on which it was attacked yesterday by the Leader of the Opposition. Yet this is the length to which we are constantly being driven by the attitude of our friends in French Canada and by the spinelessness, I guess it could be called, of English speaking Canadians. I should like to make the point that English speaking Canadians, if I understand them, are not bigoted, are not narrow and not antagonistic. But they have a very

[Mr. Fisher.]

difficult time understanding. I should like to suggest that some of those who are doing all the wailing about the mistreatment they have suffered in the past should take a good look at our history, because their interpretation of history is one of the most one-sided I have ever encountered. I should like them to look at the British North America Act closely. Let them look at section 133, for example. When they complain about the British North America Act not being followed, and the rights of Quebec being side-stepped, they should recognize that most of these sidesteps or end runs around the provisions of the act have been made with the agreement of the representatives of Quebec who sat in this chamber; that the representatives of the province of Quebec went along with them as far as provision for unemployment insurance and things of that kind are concerned. It is measures of this kind which constitute the major changes which have taken place. It was not a case of the English speaking politicians conniving in such a way as to leave the French Canadian politicians in ignorance of what they were doing. The Quebec representatives co-operated; they took part in reaching the decisions.

I sometimes wonder whether Laurier and St. Laurent were French Canadians when I hear the extreme opinions expressed by the hon. member for Lapointe. There were representatives from Quebec in this chamber and in its antecedents long before 1837 and the revolution. This piling up of the misdemeanours or wrongs committed, I suppose, by English speaking Canadians, these suggestions of interference with the arrangements of confederation in the course of some scheme practised upon French Canadians has, it seems to me, gone too far. I wanted to get this on the record particularly in view of the attack by the hon. member for Lapointe, who seemed to feel that any English speaking Canadian who expressed an opinion on a subject such as education was getting into a field which he should not enter. If this is so, why is it that these wonderfully pure constitutionalists from Quebec should for so long have accepted grants in relation to education, universities, technical training and so on?

Mr. Gregoire: I can tell you.

Mr. Fisher: If the hon. member has the answer, I believe I know what it is. If they did these things, they were probably not being correct in doing so under the terms of the constitution.

Mr. Gregoire: It was because the federal government took all the money. That is the answer.