

Public Bills

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS

SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD DAY

MEASURE TO ESTABLISH AS LEGAL HOLIDAY

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough) moved that Bill C-8, respecting Sir John A. Macdonald Day, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

He said: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Hogarth: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order. The hon. member for New Westminster is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Hogarth: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the hon. member who is presenting this bill could get it to committee immediately, with the unanimous consent of the House, if he made two small amendments, namely in paragraph 1, that the act be cited as the Sir Wilfrid Laurier Day Act, and the same amendment at the bottom of paragraph 2.

• (5:00 p.m.)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): The Chair will recognize the hon. member for Hillsborough.

Mr. Macquarrie: Mr. Speaker, unlike King Agrippa, I am not even "almost persuaded" by that interesting suggestion. I must note that this is the third time I have attempted to make it up the aisle on this, and having lost out on private members' hour before I want, in the kindest way, to suggest to my colleagues in the House that henceforth I will no longer be inhibited from protesting personally the dropping of private members' hour. In the future, when I am here during private members' hour I will want to be convinced that there is a clear and present value in cancelling private members' hour or there will be no unanimous consent coming from this member. I have watched the diminution of private members' time in the House of Commons in my long and laboured 13 years here, but I would not like any further development along these particular lines. Having said this, with all the kindness of my heart, I hope it will be borne in mind so I will not have to be an unrepentant interrupter in the future.

We Canadians, we must admit, are unfortunately not an historically minded people. In this we are unlike the Americans whom it is now again so popular to denigrate. They have, of course, their Washington's birthday, their Lincoln's birthday and so on. Since I last presented this motion we in Canada have shown our lack of historical mindedness by allowing Glensmere, the beautiful home of Sir Robert Borden, to fall before the wrecker's hammer. We can in this country celebrate St. Andrew's day, St. Patrick's day, St. George's day, St. Jean Baptiste day and even Robbie Burns day.

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel).]

John A., like Robbie Burns, was not a saint, but surely he was an essential Canadian, the father of his country. Surely, he is among the architects of confederation, the builder of a coalition government which fostered the union of the colonies. He was at all the great conferences, including the one at Charlottetown in 1864 where the whole thing was really decided.

Sir John A. was prime minister from 1867 to 1891, with a brief, inglorious interregnum from 1873 to 1878. He was a member of the legislature of the then Canada at the age of 29. He was in public life for nearly half a century. He was a consummate politician and a vigorous but not hysterical nationalist. He was interesting, colourful, engaging, a charming man, a man of gaiety and a man who was not noted as a teetotaler. He was a man of joyous nature, but for those who know of his life he was not a man unacquainted with personal sorrow. Along with the burdens of personal problems and pain, he had more than his share of public anxieties. He, too, knew insurrection and his handling of the Louis Riel crisis was not quite as easy then as it now seems to be from the comfortable hindsight of several decades. He knew the terror and anguish which comes from the assassin's bullet and his sorrow over the death of Thomas D'Arcy McGee was bitter and agonizing.

In the days before image makers, before hidden persuaders and even before Information Canada, he came through as a genuinely interesting public man, a good fellow, and we used to say that great and gay John A., until that last adjective took on a certain meaning we do not like, and a man deserving of his country's trust. The word charisma was not in vogue in the 1870's and 1880's, but this uniquely unhypocritical man, this thoroughly political person, seemed to be able to command public confidence and to engage successfully in the art of nation building. It is a part of our tepid lack of interest in our history that we do not realize how difficult was the task facing our founding fathers, nor how splendid was the achievement of those who brought this about.

Sir John A. himself declared that his greatest work was done before 1867, an interesting tribute to this earlier period. Deserving a major place in this era was the creation of the political party of which I am a member. In 1854 he set the pattern and parameters of a party, and incidentally gave it the name which it was to pick up much later. He said in 1854 "there would be a new House and new people to choose from, and our aims should be to enlarge the bounds of our party so as to embrace every person desirous of being counted as a progressive Conservative."

Although he gave little time to theory or philosophy it is clear that Macdonald wisely knew, recognized and appreciated, that political parties are in fact older than democracy and without political parties the parliamentary process does not work. Of all the qualities which made Sir John A. Macdonald a great figure, and made it possible to create and maintain a nation, I think the quality most notable was his moderation. In a country so