

Private Members' Business

tions our troops made during the various wars. Of course there is also Remembrance Day.

We can reflect on our history on Canada Day, which is a national holiday. It is entirely appropriate. It is good that Canada Day does not necessarily specify who we should be recognizing. Canadians can make those judgments themselves.

In conclusion although I appreciate the intentions of the hon. member, our party will not be supporting this motion.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Terrebonne): Madam Speaker, right away, before giving my speech, I would like to inform you that we on this side of the House find it deplorable that Reformers and Liberals are trying so hard and so sincerely to change the nature of the debate. Rather than opposing the motion for the sake of opposing it, taking exception and arguing against the merits of the motion, they are trying not to talk about it, they are talking about other issues, and are beating about the bush.

I would also like to point out that we are not trying to establish a National Patriots' Day as we have in Quebec. Yes, we celebrate that in Quebec, but this is not what we are after here. We are asking the Canadian government to recognize the role of Patriots and Reformers in Canada.

An NDP member proposed that hockey be recognized as the national sport of Canada, as well as lacrosse. What more does that involve? What national day is hockey day? That is not the issue. So we would appreciate it if people would oppose the motion, not just the winds around the motion.

That being said, I will begin my speech. The motion tabled, and I am talking about the motion that was tabled and not something else, is of very great significance for us in the Bloc Québécois.

It is essential to recognize that Patriots and Reformers played an important part in the birth of a true democracy in Canada. In fact, we must, this House must recognize the significant role that these people played in the history of Quebec and Canada and their undeniable contribution to our current political structure.

The motion tabled in this House by my hon. colleague from Verchères is, therefore, of prime importance. I repeat, we are not trying to set up a National Patriots' Day. They did it in Quebec, but there in Quebec they are ahead of their time, not you. The name of the Patriots must be cleared so that they can take their rightful place in history.

It is also true, however, that the means they used to reach their ends may seem to us, to some of us, drastic, but a closer look at the situation shows that their demands were legitimate, not their actions.

I think it would be a good idea, and I feel this even more strongly now, having listened to the two previous debates, to present an historical overview of the circumstances surrounding the rebellions of 1837–38. It would be my pleasure to do so, perhaps people will learn something. We should say, quickly, that over a period of a little more than a hundred years, from 1760 to 1867, the constitutional status of British North America changed five times. There was the Royal Proclamation in 1760, the Quebec Act 14 years later, then there was the Constitutional Act of 1791, the Act of Union in 1840 and finally the British North America Act in 1867. Five changes in a little over 100 years. But for 125 years we have not dared to touch this sacrosanct piece of paper on which the Constitution is written, with the exception of the 1982 mistake.

We will deal specifically with three of these documents. The Quebec Act of 1774, when England—we must also point out that these rules are always imposed from outside, and it is always from the outside that rules are imposed on francophones. This is what is known as colonial status. This is what we want to leave behind.

With the Quebec Act, England realized that the assimilation of Francophones in Canada was, to all intents and purposes, futile.

In order to ensure that the province "of Quebec", as it was called then, did not move toward the hand held out by the future United States south of its borders, the Crown offered what might be called a gift to the province "of Quebec" that re-established some of their rights, abolished the oath of allegiance, and recognized a French lifestyle in this British territory in North America.

After the United States gained its independence, a number of people loyal to the crown, the Loyalists, came to find refuge in this part of the British colony that is today called Canada. They asked their motherland, England, to allow them to have rights and exercise them in a land of their own.

Granting their request, England imposed the Constitutional Act of 1791 that divided the area in two—Upper Canada for the majority of Loyalists, and Lower Canada, Quebec, for the French speaking majority.

• (1150)

Therefore, in 1791, England recognized the distinct status of the French fact in North America, which our neighbours today cannot understand.

The Constitution Act introduced two new principles into the Canadian political system: parliamentarism and the representa-