

among those days in which we honour our heritage and salute the people who brought about this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Macquarrie: An eminent historian, a great pillar of the Liberal party, although I sat in his classes many years and was much convinced by him, but never converted, A. R. M. Lower, once said that if Canada had an independence day like the great country to the south of us, it would be December 11, the day in which formal indication was given that this country and other members of the Commonwealth were declared to be free and autonomous communities, in no way subordinate one to the other.

The process whereby Canada obtained its independence was a most impressive process, led by a great man from Nova Scotia, Sir Robert Borden. He had asserted vigorously the great nationalization which was required to lead us from a colonial status to something more noble and challenging. He often said the great warriors were in fact the true warriors, the men of Vimy Ridge and many other horrible blood baths in Europe where Canadians made an impact in courage and bravery far beyond their numbers. Therefore, the day of the Statute of Westminster, which was the culmination of the process, would be an important day.

I was much moved in this House when the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) produced what we so long wanted and needed, the Bill of Rights. I think the Bill of Rights is now seen to be greater even than it was then because of interpretations of the courts. That, too, was a milestone.

Some of my colleagues will not be surprised at my mentioning that the birth of Sir John A. Macdonald is something of significance. Many Americans celebrated Lincoln's birthday last week. All Americans will be celebrating Washington's birthday next week. The father of the country deserves at least passing recognition.

I am not sure that the linking of the homage to a great man and the movement toward a national holiday commends itself to my judgment. I am hardly against flags. I honour the flag. I wear it when I go abroad. I wear it in my lapel of course. I do not carry it on a staff. I am happy to be designated as a Canadian. Holidays are certainly a fine thing. Heaven knows, I would not be against the memory of Lester Pearson for whom I have the warmest recollections. He was a great man whose greatness became him. He walked with kings and kept the common touch. He was a man of genius, humour, compassion and comprehension. I would like to say that he was a typical Canadian, but in many ways, although he would be the last to declaim it—I trust I used the right word; I said declaim not disclaim—he was in many proportions greater than his fellows.

It is my thought on this particular measure, although I would be the last to criticize the hon. member or be critical of the amazing alacrity with which this particular bill got before us—this kind of speed is not typical of this House—I suggest that it is the kind of thing we should be thinking about but thinking more about. While a mid-February holiday is a delightful thing, in our anguish for one whom we loved and admired is very much upon our hearts, perhaps we should reflect upon it in a little broad-

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er perspective. I wonder whether we should think not only of more events in our past, such as some of those I have mentioned. but of other individuals in our past for whom we might properly, appropriately and with meaning pause and reflect upon for a national holiday.

I do not want to prolong the discussion, although if I start talking about Borden, Laurier and Macdonald, I will soon exhaust my time. I just wish to say that I believe it is a good idea to let us ponder this a little further because in a matter of hours, February 15 will have passed by for this year and perhaps by next year the fruition of our thoughts will come up with something even better.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Matte (Champlain): Mr. Speaker, we have no objection to passing this bill now before the House on second reading since in the last decade nobody has insisted more on the absolute necessity to bring back dignity and unity in this country than the members of our party. This is why I make only one wish, Mr. Speaker, in order not to delay the passing of this bill, that this symbol will not be only a symbol but an indication of true understanding and true unity, and heaven knows we have not reached that point yet.

The last election campaign has shown that unfortunately there is still many politicians who have not yet recognized the existence of French Canadians, the existence of the French language, in a very concrete way.

The fact that the government itself is postponing the issue regarding the implementation of all regulations respecting the official languages proves, Mr. Speaker, that we still have a long way to go if we really want the flag to be a true reflection of what exists in this country. I hope that all aspects of true national unity will materialize very vividly and concretely.

• (1720)

[*English*]

Mr. Ralph Stewart (Cochrane): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I shall be very brief. Today is, I believe, an historic day in the history of Canada and it is fitting that time should have been allowed for a short debate on the question of a flag day for Canada. Other countries set aside a day on which they honour their flag. Canada would do well to adopt the same practice. That it should be February 15 or the Monday following is also fitting, because of the anniversary we are celebrating today.

I am pleased that the Canadian flag is at last being displayed in this House, the centre of government. I have visited other countries and seen their flags in their respective legislative chambers. Yet visitors from abroad come here and wonder why the Canadian flag is not displayed here of all places. I congratulate the hon. member for Burnaby-Seymour (Mr. Nelson) for bringing forward this bill today. I want to thank the hon. member for Gaspé (Mr. Cyr) for proposing the motion in connection with which we have both worked so hard over the past six years.

The flag is one of those symbols which are so important to the patriotism of our youth. Canadians should grow up