

Canada Day Act

• (3:20 p.m.)

I think most young people think of dominion as a special status in the British empire. I was surprised, unlike my hon. friend, to learn that Newfoundland was a dominion. I thought it was a colony, never dreaming it had reached the status of a dominion. For a long time Canada was proud of her status as a dominion within the British empire. Originally we were a colony, as has been mentioned, and then through a compromise on the part of Great Britain we became a dominion in the British empire, that status being somewhat greater than colonial status and somewhat less than the status achieved by revolution in the country to our south.

We have heard over the years, as we are hearing in the present election campaign in Quebec, that Canada is not a nation, that it is subject to the political will of others and that the influence of other nations is still at work in this country. I for one—and I believe most people share my feelings—think that “dominion” is a status we have grown out of. It is true that historically our nation was established by the action of a number of equal partners. But in my opinion what really made Canada a nation was not any act of Parliament but rather the role which Canada was able to play in two wars. During those wars when the apron strings of the mother country were loosened, we took on a national identity that otherwise might have been denied us.

I think most people agree that in these days our identity as a nation is established and that Canada Day ought to commemorate the day on which the dominion became a nation. History will not deny that we once enjoyed dominion status; it will not detract from the achievements that led to the colonization of this nation; it will not detract from the achievements of the people who originally came here. Certainly those who are yet to come will be aware of our history.

Also, I think it is more honest if we call this important national day Canada Day. Some people say we celebrate our birthday on that day, and this is a custom which has developed over a considerable period. There are conservatives—I spell that with a small “c”—who are unhappy when we give up anything of any significance at all in our history. To some extent we are all that way. These remarks may also apply to a young lady of illustrious name who is contemplating marriage. Having borne the illustrious name for 17 or 18 years, she does not wish to change it, but changes it in any event because

[Mr. Peters.]

the change will bring advantages. By taking another name she does not change the illustrious history of her former name. If we are to celebrate a day which is the anniversary of our establishment as a nation, I think we are in the position of that young lady. I think it is a step most Canadians wish to take, because we shall not be renouncing any of the illustrious parts of our history.

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately I was not in the House this afternoon when debate began on the amendment of the hon. member for Hamilton-Wentworth (Mr. Gibson). In my opening remarks I wanted to say that one of the supporters of the general proposition underlying the bill is my good friend from Brantford, the hon. member for Brant (Mr. Brown).

At the outset I should like to suggest to him and to others who are anxious, as demonstrated by this initiative, to change this particular aspect of Canadian history, that the initiative arises from a lack of appreciation of the true nature of that part of Canada which is beyond what those from western Canada refer to as central Canada or upper and lower Canada. I am sure that anybody who travels beyond the boundaries of the two central provinces acquires a sense of the broad sweep of Canada and a fresh appreciation of what is really involved in the term Dominion of Canada that is not possible until one has broken out of one's shell, as it were.

I am speaking briefly on this subject this afternoon because in Manitoba we are celebrating our centennial this year. Manitoba did not come into Canadian Confederation in 1867, simply because there was no province of Manitoba in the year of Confederation. We were carved out of the Northwest Territories, out of a wilderness that some pessimists in those days said would never be of any economic significance or any important part of this great Dominion of Canada. I suppose when we celebrate our birthday on July 15 of this year we will be marking the formal entrance of Manitoba as the first “in” province to use a phrase that has been chosen for the celebration, because we must note the fact that we are the first province outside the original group which joined Confederation. We will be very proud to refer to that day as Manitoba Day.

Speaking from the perspective of a Member of Parliament who represents a province that was not party to Confederation in 1867, I think hon. members will understand why we