

National Centennial Act

title gets a completely different meaning from the English speaking person who reads the title.

At the same time I should like to place firmly on the record, particularly for the benefit of our friends whose mother tongue is French, that in the English sense of the word Canada did become a nation by the process of confederation. This process was an event of historic importance and significance, well worthy of the commemoration celebrations we are now planning for 1967. The year 1867 marks the time a number of independently governed British colonies on the North American continent were constituted into a new nation to be known as Canada. At the same time the old province of Canada was divided into the present province of Quebec and Ontario. This was the time the effective government of Canada was transferred from London, England to Ottawa, to a federal parliament elected by Canadians. This, then, becomes the birthday of our country, Canada, using the English meaning of the word "nation", as a politically autonomous group of people inhabiting a recognized territory and bound together by common bonds of allegiance, citizenship and governmental organization. This is the meaning that is carried to English speaking people who fully understand the meaning of those words.

I cannot help the feeling that many of my friends in the province of Quebec do not recognize the importance of this constitutional step which was taken in 1867, nearly 100 years ago. It seems to me that an impression still remains, often enough fostered by politicians who should know better, that the federal government is not their government, and that it is not in any way essentially different from the colonial government which existed prior to 1867.

It is remarkable that this attitude should persist, when in fact Quebec province has provided Canada with two of its most capable and respected prime ministers, namely Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Louis St. Laurent. Under their leadership Canada passed one quarter of its almost a century of political life. I am thinking now of the country of Canada. Quebec also has been traditionally the backbone of the Liberal party, which has spent more years in office than any other Canadian political party since 1867. If any province has had a chance to say what it wanted by way of federal government policy in the past 100 years, that province has been Quebec.

I am supporting the change of name proposed here because I believe the change is necessary to avoid any undue misunderstanding on the part of Canadians who come from Quebec. All the same, I would appeal to those who are of French Canadian background to

endeavour to understand precisely what the word "nation" means in the English language. Probably we are talking about the same thing, and we are far closer to mutual understanding than technical interpretation and meanings of words would apparently convey. If one talks in English about a national centennial, one is not denying that French Canadian culture existed before 1867. When one talks in English about Canada as one nation, certainly one is not denying the existence of a French Canadian language nor its right to continue its important place in Canadian culture. Personally I wish every French Canadian inhabitant in Canada to have the fullest chance to preserve and develop their culture. Confederation, united under a common form of government, brought together men and women of different cultures who wanted to become citizens of the new and great Canadian nation. It has, of course, attracted many others who have since come to live here, who are neither French nor English but who also wanted to live under this government of Canada.

It is this founding agreement which made Canada an independent and which has led to sovereign political entity that we propose to commemorate in the year 1967. I hope that those who live in the province of Quebec will realize that this is something entirely different from the original discovery, settlement and development of our land, whether by our French or English pioneers. It is an event that we should celebrate because this is what we look forward to as a nation.

It is my hope that all Canadians will stop long enough to consider the intention of the original fathers of confederation when they brought confederation into being nearly 100 years ago. This was to make Canada a new, autonomous country which later became part of the commonwealth, but still a nation to have its own citizenship and its own government. Let us make sure that not only do we celebrate the centennial but that we have a Canada in which to celebrate it. Let us stand together to make sure that this original purpose of the fathers of confederation is continued and strengthened. Surely if the changing of a word or two in the title of this act helps us to understand the real purpose which we should be looking for today, then we should all be for it.

[Translation]

Mr. Auguste Choquette (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, I have but a few very brief comments to make on the bill now before the house.

There was quite a bit of discussion yesterday, at the resolution stage, and we heard some very pleasant observations, especially from the hon. member for Lapointe (Mr.