

National Centennial Act

French Canadians their share of the blame, especially those French Canadians from the province of Quebec who sat here, in parliament, and who, instead of working in the interest of this Canada of ours, blindly followed the party which ordered them not to say a word and not to claim full respect of our rights.

The Chairman: Order. I have been hesitating for some time to interrupt the hon. member during his interesting remarks, but may I remind him now that he should stick as much as possible to the terms of the resolution which is presently before the committee. The question under discussion is not the principle of the legislation we want to amend, but rather the very terms of the amendment. I urge the hon. member to try to restrict his remarks to the terms of this resolution.

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your suggestion that I should deal strictly with the spirit of the resolution now under discussion. I should like to point out, however, that this afternoon the leader of the official opposition, as well as all the others who took the floor, almost without exception, referred to Canadian history.

Mr. Lamontagne: Except me.

Mr. Caouette: I shall try to restrict my remarks to the resolution as far as possible, but I would ask you to be lenient towards me and to give me enough scope.

Mr. Chairman, the Prime Minister also stated, and I think this has to do, after all, with the celebrations to be held in 1967:

For French speaking Canadians, confederation set up a bilingual and bicultural nation.

All French Canadians feel strongly about this, whether we sit on this side or the other side of the house. I see that my hon. friend from Matapedia-Matane (Mr. Tremblay) is smiling. He knows that we are right. It is a fact that for us, confederation set up a bilingual and bicultural nation.

It protected their language and their culture throughout Canada.

It meant association, not domination.

As far as association is concerned, we are of course quite ready to co-operate, and to take part in that association. But as far as assimilation or domination are concerned, we reject them both.

The Prime Minister said further:

French speaking Canadians believed that such an association would give the two founding races equal opportunities to take part in the various stages of the development of Canada.

That is indeed what the French Canadians believed and still believe today.

Mr. Chairman, on December 17, 1962, the Prime Minister stated also:

Certain recent developments clearly indicate that we are going through another serious crisis as regards national unity. We became a nation long ago, but we still have not reached an agreement on all the symbols of nationality; even worse, in certain circles, doubts are expressed about the very principles on which our confederation rests.

In certain of our western provinces, and in some parts of the maritimes, the equality of the two great Canadian races, of the two great ethnic groups which form our nation is often denied, under the pretext that there is in Canada an English speaking majority and a French speaking minority, and that we should not expect therefore to be treated otherwise than as a minority.

Mr. Chairman, we firmly believe that throughout Canada minorities are treated equitably, even the French minority. But outside of Quebec, the French minority is not put on an equal footing with the English-speaking majority, while we, in the province of Quebec, do put on an equal footing the English speaking minority.

Professor Frank H. Underhill, quoted by the Prime Minister, said recently:

"It is unfortunate to note that we seem to drift without compass. We have lost this conviction of national determination which inspired our forebears in 1867... We are feeling our way to recover the sense of greatness which inspired us in the days of yore... The present times call for an unflinching intellectual effort of a higher degree, a sense of imagination more spirited a state of mind more experienced than what we had to exert in the past."

Mr. Chairman, was it not the main purpose of confederation to establish mutual respect between the two great cultures and to preserve this British land in America, that is to avoid annexation to the United States.

And speaking of concessions which have been made, I believe that French Canadians have done more than their share in the past. I will give a few examples, not to prove that those people were wrong throughout their lifetime, but that as far as the principle of co-operation is concerned, they were gradually overrun by the will of the majority in Canada.

I only wish to give a few examples from history, as for instance the murder of Louis Riel, the champion of French influence in the prairies.

One might mention also the capitulation of Cartier himself, in 1871, concerning schools in New Brunswick. Those were concessions on the part of French Canadians, but they were made under pressure from the majority that was trying to assert itself at that time.

And what about the capitulation of Sir Wilfrid Laurier in 1905, on the Manitoba school question?

Then there was conscription imposed upon the French Canadians in 1917, which meant defeat for the Conservatives during a good