

House of Commons Debates

FIRST SESSION—TENTH PARLIAMENT

SPEECH

OF

MR. HENRI BOURASSA, M.P.

ON

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT IN THE NORTH-WEST

OTTAWA, TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 1905.

Mr. HENRI BOURASSA (Lahelle). Mr. Speaker, in resuming the debate upon what I hold to be the most important piece of legislation that has been discussed by the Canadian parliament since confederation, I feel deeply the responsibility resting upon me both for the vote I shall give as a member of this House and for the opinions I shall express to-day. In the course of the very remarkable speech in which the Prime Minister introduced this legislation over a month ago, I was especially struck with one sentence, and that sentence has remained in my memory ever since. Having reviewed the legislation through which these Territories had passed since their entrance into confederation, the Prime Minister said: 'Now the time has come to put upon these Territories the stamp of Canadian nationality.' It is under the light of that principle that I intend to carry on this discussion. It seems to be that, through the turmoil, passions and prejudices that have been aroused, in sincerity perhaps on the part of people, but surely with no other purpose on the part of others than to snatch at popular favour at the expense of the better judgment of the country—I say that perhaps through the turmoil, passions and prejudices we have been passing through for the last month, too many Canadian citizens and Canadian representatives have unfortunately

forgotten the important duty they have to perform, and what will be the result of that duty. Sir, we should not forget that those Territories for which we are now legislating will probably contain within half a century or a century, one-half the population of Canada; therefore if we have any interest in what is going to be the future of our common land, we should be very careful of all the articles of this piece of legislation, as well as of the comments we make upon them.

It is not my intention to discuss at any length, or even to discuss at all, the other features of this Bill, but this one clause so much commented upon—I mean the school question. However, I may say in passing that I thoroughly agree with the position that was taken by the government on the land question. Starting from the same point of view I have just stated, namely, that we must put the stamp of Canadian nationality on these Territories, I think it was the duty of the federal government to retain within their powers the right to legislate over the granting of the lands upon which one half of the population of Canada will be called upon at no distant period to live and to prosper. Although I have the greatest confidence in the public spirit and patriotism of the men who are now at the head of public affairs in the Northwest Territories, I say that before long the time