

National Centennial Act

When I spoke in Osgoode Hall and in Sarnia, at the very beginning of the meeting, the national anthem "O Canada" was sung. I was impressed and happy to find that English speaking people realize exactly what our position is. We must feel at home everywhere in Canada.

Mr. Chairman, we suggested recently to the provincial authorities of Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta to give their French Canadian minorities the same treatment which is given to the English minorities in our province, in Quebec. There is no discrimination in the province of Quebec and I proclaim this loudly all across Canada.

In my own city of Rouyn, 15 per cent of the population is English speaking; 85 per cent of the population is French, but nevertheless there is no discrimination, as far as schools or the treatment given to everybody are concerned. We feel we are all of the same family. I pay taxes which help to finance Protestant schools and I am glad and satisfied to do it, because I am helping my fellow citizens, human persons, to acquire the knowledge they need to face life.

Mr. Chairman, those feelings do not exist in your own constituency which includes Cornwall, because there are French Canadians who are not treated like the English Canadians in the province of Quebec.

Mr. Chairman, we suggest that the other provinces should adopt an attitude similar to ours, in the province of Quebec. I think that we would thus achieve a better understanding, a greater harmony, between the two great races of our country, Canada.

Quite recently, the Prime Minister very rightly said:

Confederation is the creed conforming our faith in the future of a united Canada.

It was also a declaration of independence with regard to the United States. And that has prevailed since confederation, in 1867.

We decided to go our own way on this continent, from sea to sea—not only with regard to that part of Canada which is Quebec, not only for that part which is British Columbia—but from sea to sea, first of all, as a part of the British empire, and later as an independent member of the commonwealth of nations.

That declaration, though significant in its implications, is true; it should be respected by the ten provinces which make up today our Canadian nation.

We knew that such a declaration, based on such a belief, would carry with it an economic price. At that time, we were ready—and I hope we still are—to pay that price, the price of being Canadians.

How well advised was the right hon. Prime Minister to make that statement—such

[Mr. Caouette.]

a fundamentally Canadian statement, respectful of both elements, of all Canadians who have accepted that sacrifice to build up a Canada which some elements are trying to destroy. We must oppose the destruction of this country, yes, but by taking action and assuming our responsibilities. We should not try to escape those responsibilities, more particularly at this time, when we are only a few years away from our centennial celebrations.

Mr. Chairman, the right hon. Prime Minister added:

However, confederation entails another price which many among us are either willing to forget or unwilling to pay. Confederation meant not only rejection of political and economical annexation by the United States, but also of the American concept of the "melting pot", which creates that country's national unity.

From a technical point of view, confederation has perhaps never been a treaty between states, but it was an agreement, an understanding between the two races which founded Canada, based on the principle of an acceptable association on equal terms.

That is the very basis of the confederation of 1867.

That is the spirit of the constitution, as that of confederation itself, which was established by the founders, among which were Macdonald and Cartier.

The agreement stipulated that national political unity would be realized and maintained without—
—without—

—without the imposition of a system of racial, cultural and linguistic uniformity.

However, that agreement was more academic than real.

An agreement on paper, a hazy agreement. They forgot to realize it. They forgot, in other terms, to respect the full and entire letter of the agreement.

Outside the province of Quebec and as Canada was developing, it was more often violated than kept, and for reasons that are easily understood.

Mr. Chairman, that is what the right hon. Prime Minister, head of the government of which the minister, the President of the Privy Council, is a member, accepts and displays here, squarely, before the whole nation:

—that agreement was more academic than real. Outside the province of Quebec, and as Canada was developing, it was more often violated than kept—

That is the grievance French Canadians utter today. Not that we ask concessions, no, I state it again, we do not want concessions, we simply want the respect of the letter of the confederation established in 1867. I shall not say, however, if that letter was not respected, if that basis, that foundation was not respected, that it was entirely the fault of English Canadians. No, far from it, Mr. Chairman. I would put on the shoulders of the