

National Centennial Act

It is in part because of this rather significant mistake from an historical standpoint that the Hon. Mr. Lesage, following a letter from the former prime minister of Canada, replied on October 19, 1961 as follows—in my opinion, this letter should be recorded in *Hansard*, since very few hon. members, it seems, have read it. I quote:

My dear Prime Minister,

I hope you will excuse my delay in answering your letter of October 4. I have recently been away on a trip to Europe and, especially, to Paris for the opening of Quebec House.

No doubt will you be inclined to excuse that delay in view of the much more striking one which seems to have occurred. I refer to the fact that, in your letter, you are asking me to appoint two delegates to a "national conference on the centennial of Canada". I think that centennial could have been celebrated either in 1634, a hundred years after Jacques Cartier, or at the very beginning of the eighteenth century, a hundred years after Champlain, whose glorious achievements cannot be brushed aside off-handedly by a mere stroke of the pen.

Your act is aptly entitled "An act respecting the observance of the centennial of confederation in Canada", but that title is inconsistent with section 3, which refers to the "national centennial", and section 17, which refers to "Canada's centennial".

I do not feel I can take it upon myself to let such an ambiguity remain nor do I dare ask my colleagues of the executive council right away to assist me in appointing two persons to represent the province of Quebec at the "national conference on the centennial", for fear of sanctioning something which French Canadians have too much pride to accept, let alone the fact that it would compel their political representatives to take, for the sake of dignity, a stand not in keeping with their true feelings of friendship and their desire to co-operate.

I rely on your sense of justice, my dear Prime Minister, to admit that Canadian history did not begin in 1867 and that to say otherwise is seriously prejudicial to French speaking and English speaking Canadians whose forefathers founded this country long before confederation.

Awaiting your official letter asking the Quebec government to appoint two representatives to the national conference on the centennial, I remain, my dear Prime Minister,

Yours truly.

That letter was dated October 1961, and since the reply of the former prime minister of Canada was not satisfactory, Mr. Lesage renewed his request on May 2, 1963. This time, he wrote to the present Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson). This letter has already been tabled in the house and I do not intend to read it again. I should like, however, to put on record the letter that the present Prime Minister sent to Mr. Lesage on June 7, 1963. Here it is:

My dear Premier,

In the last few days, I had the opportunity to look more fully into the objections you raised in your letter of May 2 regarding certain expressions used in the Centennial of Confederation Act. Those objections seem justified to me.

[Mr. Lamontagne.]

As early as possible in the course of this session, we will introduce amendments to certain sections of the act so as to bring them in line with the general title and historical facts.

I hope that, following those changes, the Quebec government will be able to participate in the celebration of the centenary of confederation and to take the necessary steps in that connection.

Later on, when the Quebec legislature was considering a bill concerning the celebration of the centenary, the two major political leaders, Hon. Jean Lesage and the leader of the opposition, Mr. Daniel Johnson, both agreed that the provincial legislation should not be enacted until the federal act was amended as I have just indicated.

I believe that the problem raised by this resolution is very simple. First of all, I am not the one who delivered the ultimatum, and I think that in this particular case, it is an absolutely justified request, because it agrees perfectly with historical facts.

In my opinion, the problem which we are facing as members of this parliament is very simple. Either we rectify the obvious historical mistakes, which have crept more particularly in the French wording of the present legislation, or, as the leaders of the two main political parties of the province of Quebec have stated, the latter, through the will of the legislature, will refuse to participate in the celebration of the centenary.

Several members of the official opposition have expressed their desire to satisfy the justified grievances of the province of Quebec. As a matter of fact, I heard the whip of the official opposition say something to that effect this afternoon.

In my opinion, the resolution under consideration aims precisely at settling such a grievance. And the time has come, I feel, as much for them as for us all, to put right an obvious wrong, to refrain from needlessly increasing the tensions that exist in our country today and to get ready, all together, to celebrate the centennial of Canada's confederation.

Mr. Perron: Mr. Chairman, my remarks shall be brief, but I should like to set some facts straight on matters discussed by the hon. member for Grey-Bruce (Mr. Winkler) and at the same time, set the historic facts in their true context.

The purpose of this resolution, to change the present title of the act to the "Centennial of Confederation Act", is quite justified.

The President of the Privy Council (Mr. Lamontagne) did quite a good job of shedding light on facts concerning the observance of the centennial of confederation which, I think, will be one more step towards the future of this fine and great country of ours.