

*Government Orders*

the first time in its history, its representation would fall below 25 per cent, since it would have only 75 seats out of 301.

This explains our proposal which, basically, is the same as the Liberal proposal of 1992, when they were in opposition. Let us see what the hon. member for Papineau—Saint-Michel and present Minister of Foreign Affairs was saying at the time. He was happy to seek for Quebec a guarantee of at least 25 per cent of the seats, saying that it would be a major gain for Quebec.

Yet, none of the Liberal members who were in this House in 1992 and are still here today supported our motion for a minimum of 25 per cent. How is it that these members changed their minds in so short a time? Why do they refuse Quebec something which is really minimal? Why do they refuse to make a move in the right direction? Why do they refuse a simple overture to Quebec? Why do they refuse a small sign of attachment to Quebec?

• (1310)

Why is this government refusing to show that it cares about Quebec, that it wants it to remain in Canada? Canada has no interest in having Quebec under-represented or diminished in the House of Commons. Quebec must keep its representation because it is a nation. It is one of the founding peoples. As a founding nation, francophones occupied all of Canada and went even a little farther, since our territory went as far as Louisiana.

It goes without saying that this request from Quebec must be supported since the large majority of Quebec members in this House voted in favour of guaranteeing Quebec a 25 per cent minimum representation. Daniel Johnson, Leader of the Official Opposition in the Quebec National Assembly, presented the following motion: "That the National Assembly of Quebec reiterate the goal of maintaining a representation of at least 25 per cent for Quebec in the House of Commons of Canada and request the Government of Quebec to make representations to that effect".

Thus we know that there is a large consensus in Quebec, going beyond party lines, to claim this minimum guarantee of 25 per cent. When we see the Progressive Conservative Party, the official opposition that is the Bloc Québécois, and the independent member for Beauce support such a motion to include in Bill C-69 a guarantee of a 25 per cent representation, it is obvious that this issue achieves a large consensus in Quebec.

Needless to say that Senator Rivest also supported this provision. Even the governments of Quebec which requested that such a provision be included in our legislation have given it their unwavering support, and as far as I know, the current government had never retracted what had previously been agreed to.

How strange it is indeed to see the government finally recant on something that it supported in September 1992. This government reneged on what our Canadian partners had unanimously

accepted. Of course, it was in the context of the Charlottetown accord. But should Quebec be punished because the rest of Canada decided that this accord was not to their advantage?

You will therefore concede that the bill before us today for third reading is incomplete. Especially when it comes to the criteria used to determine whether there can be a departure from the boundaries of a riding or those used to designate special ridings. It is also incomplete because it fails to deal with the issue of the representation of one of the country's two founding peoples. The vote on the amendment proposed by the official opposition demonstrates without a doubt that the federal government's failure to guarantee in this bill fair representation in this House for Quebec was not an innocent oversight: it was deliberate.

Would Canadians have been against the government finally recognizing Quebec's distinct society status, status as a founding people, as a nation on which this country was built? I am convinced the answer is no. This is the smallest request Quebec has made over the past 50 years.

I would be helpful to go back to the beginning and to remember that Canada's history all started with the arrival of Jacques Cartier in Gaspé, in 1534. Then comes the founding of Quebec City by Samuel de Champlain in 1608; the founding of Trois-Rivières and Montreal in the decades that followed and afterwards, the establishment of the first public government in New France, as Canada was called then.

Our first public institutions were created in 1663, when the King of France established the Sovereign Council of New France. We slowly stopped being French, became Canadians, then French Canadians and, ultimately, Quebecers.

Meanwhile, in 1774, the Quebec Act restored civil law in Quebec and allowed us to have an unelected legislative council. They were afraid to give francophones, who were so peaceful, democratic institutions, institutions to which Quebecers could elect their own representatives. And yet, Quebecers, Canadians of the time, had shown great pacifism and open-mindedness.

Finally, in 1791, thanks to the Constitutional Act, we were granted the right to elect our own representatives to our very first national assembly, in Quebec City. In 1791, we gained partial control over our institutions. Things went fairly fast after that, except that Canada was divided into Upper and Lower Canada. The assembly elected by Lower Canada has no extraterritorial power and cannot legislate on matters concerning Upper Canada and vice versa.

• (1315)

In 1867, the institutions we still have today were created. It may seem somewhat paradoxical for a sovereignist to rise in this House to ask for a 25 per cent representation. We have not left yet. We are still part of Canada. It is our duty and our responsibility, in accordance with our commitment to defend Quebec's