

*Government Orders*

Our first institutions, not democratic but public, were granted in 1663 by the King of France through the establishment of the Sovereign Council of New France. These institutions reflected the values of the time: a governor, an intendant, the Bishop of Quebec City and those co-opted by them for a total of seven people, near the end of colonial times, but without any democratic guarantees.

We, francophones, had a hard time achieving our democratic rights on the American continent. Our motherland never gave them to us.

• (1630)

They tried to exercise in New France the same absolute domination as in Old France. Gradually, we stopped being French while, of course, maintaining good relations with what was then our mother or home country and became a more and more distinct nation.

At first, we called ourselves Canadiens or, as we used say, "Canayens". So, on one side, there was us Canadiens and, on the other, the English who occupied part of the land.

From 1663 to 1759, we operated with these institutions. Then, in 1759, the battle that took place on the Plains of Abraham was a victory for some, but for us it was a defeat. It brought about constitutional changes, again, military government in 1759, a royal proclamation in 1763 which ceded the colony of New France to England in exchange for Guadeloupe and Martinique. It is clear that errors of judgment were made somewhere along the way because, while anglophones had won here, in America, when, on the Old Continent, the British won the war against the French and the Treaty of Paris was signed, they got New France, but France kept Guadeloupe and Martinique.

Those are great travel destinations, but in terms of the relative value of the two, I think it was a sucker deal at the time.

Still no democratic institutions. In 1774, the Quebec Act that was handed to us—because we got whatever was left over—nonetheless restored civil law in Quebec, which allowed us to have a legislative council, but not an elected one. They were afraid to give francophones, so peace-loving, democratic institutions in which Quebecers could be represented by the people of their choice. Instead, we were given a legislative council appointed by the governor.

But the Quebecers, Canadiens of those days had certainly demonstrated great pacifism and great open-mindedness because there were 63,000 francophones in Quebec at the time of the conquest and only 3,000 to 4,000 survivors of Wolfe's regiment. With that kind of power relationship, had we been even slightly vindictive, the slightest bit vindictive, we would not have had to go into overtime to decide the fate of these 3,000 or so people. We went along with a de facto situation and, guided

by the elites who governed us in those days, whether we liked it or not—we will not rewrite history—we tolerated this situation.

Finally, in 1791, the Constitutional Act gave us for the very first time the right to have elected representatives and the first House of Assembly in Quebec. Naturally, we did not take any chances. It is like in a car: there is an accelerator, but there is also a brake pedal. The Westminster government allowed us to have a house of assembly made up of elected members, but it also maintained a legislative council, which was appointed by the governor and which could oppose the decisions of the assembly.

In 1791, we gained control over some institutions. The situation evolved rather rapidly and the country was divided into two parts: Upper Canada and Lower Canada. The assembly elected in Lower Canada had no extra-territorial jurisdiction. Consequently, it could not legislate for Upper Canada, nor could Upper Canada legislate for Lower Canada. We then move on to the 1830s with the Patriotes' rebellion and the infamous Durham report, which recommended unifying the two Canadas to finally assimilate and anglicize the French-speaking nation in America, something which was not to happen.

• (1635)

For eight years, while English was the only official language in the house of assembly of the Parliament of the Province of Canada, French Canadians fought, in their own language, to have French recognized as an official language. Thanks to their tenacity, justice was finally done in 1848, when they obtained the right to use French, which also became the language used in the legislation. I will end with 1867 and the emergence of new institutions.

You will understand, Mr. Speaker, why I simply cannot agree when I hear simplistic comments such as those made by the Reform Party, to the effect that Canada started to exist in October 1993. Canada has existed for a long time. As a member of one of the founding nations which forged Canada's Constitution, I respectfully submit that, given our long common history, this critical mass of 25 per cent is the breath of life which Quebec needs if it remains, but I hope it will not, part of the Canadian federation.

In any case, it is better to be safe than sorry; it is better to buckle up, even if you do not wish to have an accident. It is from that perspective that I wanted to discuss the 25 per cent rule. This rule is so fundamental that, even though Bill C-69 includes some improvements, the fact that Quebec is not guaranteed a minimum of 25 per cent of the total representation in the House of Commons is reason enough, in fact the only reason, for the Bloc not to support this bill at third reading. Consequently, we will oppose this legislation.