

Government Orders

They do not have the support of the majority of the people of Quebec. Only when they soften their separatist stand and talk about some sort of mushy sovereigntist association can they even get anywhere close to a 50 per cent vote in the polls.

This band of separatists should be ashamed as they stand in the House. They collect their paycheques every month from the Government of Canada, from taxpayers in western Canada, as they stand here to talk about destroying the country. They should be ashamed of themselves. Perhaps they should consider going back to their ridings and staying there until they develop a different attitude, a Canadian attitude, before they show their faces in the House of Commons. The Parliament of Canada represents all people of Canada.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, we were elected by our fellow citizens to discuss an extremely important issue to them, namely their recognition as a people and a nation. In fact, this issue is so important that, over the last 30 years, it has been very time-consuming and has kept us from dealing with other major concerns.

You cannot overlook that reality. You can claim that we are a small minority, but the fact is that we are not. We represent a people and a nation similar to many others in the world, which seek, peacefully, to be recognized and which have sought that recognition since the very beginning. This is what we are telling you, and we are also telling you that you will keep hearing about it. So, you better watch, listen and understand that this people and this nation have a right to exist.

Mr. Harris: Go home.

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): No, I will not go home. Mr. Speaker, that should be translated. I find it despicable to be told to go home while, as the representative for my constituents, I reflect on our history, pointing out that we want prosperity but that prosperity will only be possible if we are treated as equals.

• (1225)

This is a despicable and unacceptable insult. If you think that this is how you will make your country prosper, you are grossly mistaken.

Mr. Réginald Bélair (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to begin with, I find myself wondering whether the real issue being debated is Quebec's borders or the electoral boundaries to be set by the new commissions.

Firstly, much has been said in this House and in the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on the subject of the new electoral boundaries, especially for northern Ontario and more specifically for my riding, Cochrane—Superior. The fate of my riding, and of northern Ontario in general, depends on the recommendations the commission will make.

First off, it must be said in this House that all Canadians, wherever they live in Canada, have the right to fair and equitable representation. Obviously, these two words are charged with meaning. In particular the word "equitable" is defined in Larousse to mean "in accordance with justice". Fair representation is the most important point which must guide us in this debate, and this means that rural regions in Canada should always have direct access to their members of Parliament. It is not enough for members of Parliament and their constituents to communicate with each other by telephone or fax, because this will ultimately depersonalize all that Canada represents.

[English]

The House affairs committee was somewhat conciliatory when it permitted the new commissions to be set up to accept an amendment wherein the same commission may depart from its application to the rules when considering the economies, the traditional and natural boundaries and rural characteristics of a territory, and the access to means of communication and transportation.

The commission may in its wisdom go beyond the 25 per cent quota when we talk about the population. This means that a riding may have less than the 25 per cent permissible quota in relation to the quotas of a specific province. This is the case for my riding of Cochrane—Superior and the riding of Timiskaming—French River.

In future it will be almost impossible to reach the quota of 97,000 people in a riding in northern Ontario and for that matter in most ridings in northern Canada. Suffice it to say that once the commissions and the hearings are set up, my colleagues from northern Ontario and I will fight to the end along with many concerned citizens and organizations to save the riding of Cochrane—Superior. This is not only for the sake of saving a riding but also saving a voice of rural Canada in Parliament.

In general across Canada there are 13 ridings with 100,000 square kilometres and more. Cochrane—Superior has 351,000 square kilometres with 41 organized main communities. It stretches from the border of Quebec to the east and goes west to the riding of Thunder Bay—Nipigon, which is some 425 miles.

• (1230)

In 1994 I logged 23,000 kilometres in order to try to serve my constituents as best I could. It would take 18 hours non-stop to go around the riding of Cochrane—Superior. To divide it into