

*Government Orders*

would have certain consequences. If the Magdalen Islands are entitled to have their own member, the riding of Bonaventure will lose the constituency that would form the new riding on the islands. So there is still a problem for the Gaspé peninsula.

What happens to the ridings of Gaspé, Matapédia—Matane, Rimouski—Témiscouata and Bonaventure? What about them? Does subsection 19(3) provide a way to deal with the problem of the Gaspé peninsula? Unfortunately, the subsection is not sufficiently detailed. The Gaspé peninsula is a region with a decreasing population, where members must cover considerable territory. They must deal with problems that do not exist, or at least not in the same way, in the more central areas of the country or province represented. Members are concerned about representation in the Gaspé peninsula.

Subsection 19(3) is far too restrictive to be acceptable to us. We had suggested maintaining in the bill before the House today the rules now in effect. What are these rules?

At the present time, a provincial commission may depart from the 25-per cent rule in any case where any special community or diversity of interests of the inhabitants of various regions of the province appears to render such a departure necessary or desirable. So in fact, provincial commissions have far more leeway when they have to deal with specific cases. They have far more flexibility than they have under this bill.

So a region, like the lower St. Lawrence, the Gaspé or the Islands, would have benefitted more under current legislation than they will under the extremely restrictive legislation they want us to adopt today.

Clause 19 is for the official opposition a major reason for not supporting this bill.

Clause 16 is unacceptable as well, both for what it says and for what it does not say. Its silence speaks volumes. The government is turning a deaf ear to the traditional request by Quebecers and their successive governments for minimum representation in the House of Commons, as enjoyed by some of the Atlantic provinces.

Representation of the Atlantic provinces is guaranteed, as you know, by the senatorial clause which dates back to 1915. We have no argument with this provision.

• (1305)

It enables Prince Edward Island, with a population of 120,000, to have four members in this House, because the senatorial provision specifies that a province may not have fewer representatives in the House of Commons than it has in the Senate. Prince Edward Island is guaranteed four seats in the

Senate. The same rule applies to New Brunswick. It has a guarantee of ten seats in the Senate.

Although its population does not warrant its having ten seats in the House, New Brunswick is entitled to ten seats. We have no problem with that. The Terms of Union of Newfoundland with Canada of 1949 also covered this point and could be used to guarantee proper representation of Newfoundland in both the House of Commons and the Senate. This is just what it did; it guaranteed Newfoundland six seats in the Senate.

If we accept the senatorial clause that guarantees are to be given to Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, why is there such an impediment to giving guarantees to Quebec on the subject of minimum representation?

Quebec is one of the two founding nations of this country. The collective memory of Quebecers has not forgotten that, in 1867, we were one of the two founding peoples. Allow me to remind you that on June 30, 1867, on the eve of the day the British North America Act was to come into force, Quebec, then called Lower Canada, had 65 of the 130 seats in the Parliament of the Province of Canada, that is half the seats, 50 per cent of the members.

Through its representatives, that is to say those elected to represent us, Quebec accepted at the time of the British North America Act to be limited to 65 seats out of 181 in the Parliament of Canada. This was the agreement reached by the Fathers of Confederation which was to come into force on July 1, 1867.

There was no referendum at the time. There was no consultation of the people of Quebec before the decision was made. It is also important to note that women were not consulted, since they did not have the right to vote at that time. There was no constitutional provision for a minimum representation for Quebec. The only guarantee we got was that Quebec would have 65 seats, although it did not say out of how many. On that point, there was nothing in the act.

Then, with the expansion of the Canadian territory and the inclusion of new provinces in the Confederation, the proportion of seats held by Quebec in the House of Commons constantly diminished until, in the last few decades, it stabilized at somewhere slightly above 25 per cent. Clearly the Fathers of Confederation erred when they failed to include a clause guaranteeing Quebec a minimum representation and, at that time, it should have been 50 per cent.

It is rather difficult to rewrite history and to claim 50 per cent today. What we are asking for is a guarantee of at least 25 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons. Should Quebec participate in the elections for the thirty-sixth Parliament, for