

*Government Orders*

Quebec. The hon. member for Papineau—Saint-Michel described the guarantee of 25 per cent for Quebec as an incredible step forward.

Well, as regards our motion which was voted on yesterday, once again none of the Liberal members in this House in 1992, who are still here today, voted in favour. Why did the members change their minds in the space of three years? Why deny Quebec something so minor? I would like, in passing, to recognize the very open-minded approach to the matter taken by the hon. member for Burnaby—Kingsway, who voted with the official opposition to guarantee Quebec minimum representation of 25 per cent, as did the hon. member for Beauce, as if this were perfectly natural.

It was perfectly natural, since the vast majority of members from Quebec present in this House yesterday voted in favour of this minimum guarantee of 25 per cent. We can therefore say that there is very broad consensus in Quebec, which goes beyond party lines, that Quebec should enjoy a minimum guarantee of 25 per cent. When the Progressive Conservative Party, the official opposition, the Bloc Québécois, the hon. member for Burnaby—Kingsway and the independent member for Beauce all support the motion to include guaranteed representation of 25 per cent in Bill C-69, it is obvious that there is broad support in Quebec on this point. I need not add that Senator Rivest had given his support for this provision. Even the support of the governments of Quebec, which had called for the inclusion of this provision in the legislation, did not fail. As far as I know, as well, the present government never shied away from what had been agreed in the past.

It is strange to see the government back away from something it supported in September 1992—the vote was on September 10, 1992—without much justification. Two days ago, on Monday, I listened to the arguments which the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands and the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River put forward, arguments which were not convincing. I do admit, however, that under normal circumstances, these two people are extremely convincing, but, for people to be able to convince others, they themselves must be convinced.

It goes without saying that, when people rise to make representations that they are forced to make—because any old reason to vote against the amendment will do—they obviously cannot be convincing. The unconvinced cannot be convincing. This was the impression that I got the other day from the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, the impression that he did not believe in the things that he was saying and that he was using the pretext of constitutional technicalities as a reason for refusing to support a motion which had already been allowed by the Chair and declared admissible following a procedural debate. It is a little odd that the debate swung in this direction.

• (1625)

You will understand therefore, that, at the end of the day, this bill will be incomplete, as I said earlier, because of its stand on the issue of allowable deviations from the boundary rules in special ridings and because of its failure to take a stand on the issue of one of the country's founding peoples. Was this an intentional omission on the part of the government?

We might have asked ourselves this question when debate began on the bill. But, after the vote yesterday on the official opposition's motion guaranteeing Quebec 25 per cent of the seats in the House, it was quite clear that the government had not simply overlooked this detail, but that it was omitted by design. The government does not want to guarantee Quebec fair representation in this House and does not want to accept as a criterion the fact that the nation of francophones in Quebec is a founding people, the cradle of francophones in America. The day we took such a decision was a very sad day indeed.

Would Canadians have been unhappy to see the government finally recognize Quebec's distinct society status, founding people status, status as a nation which built this country? I think not. Yet, yesterday, all it would have taken to recognize this was a majority vote in this House. But it was denied us. It was the most modest demand formulated in the last 50 years.

Without going back to prehistory, we can go back several decades: in the 1930s, there was the Rowell-Sirois commission in Quebec; in the 1950s, the Tremblay commission also studied constitutional issues; the Laurendeau-Dunton commission reviewed what was happening in this country in terms of the Constitution.

I invite our friends from the Reform Party, who think that Canadian history started with their election, to read about the events of that period. It would be a good idea to return to the source to understand that Canadian history started, we are not sure exactly when, with the first people to land on our shores, probably the Vikings who landed somewhere near Newfoundland at the beginning of the millennium. Then there was the arrival of Jacques Cartier in Gaspé in 1534, the founding of Quebec City by Samuel de Champlain in 1608, the founding of Trois-Rivières and Montreal in the following decades. And finally, the establishment of the first government in New France, as Canada was then called.

In the beginning, we had a government of companies. As you probably remember, the King of France entrusted private companies like the Company of One Hundred Associates and the Dutch West India Company with the administration of the territory. The King of England, for his part, gave the Hudson's Bay Company the English part of the territory that later became British North America. Territories throughout the continent were administered by private companies.