

Government Orders

The petitioners draw to the attention of the House that the disbanding of the Canadian Airborne Regiment is an act without precedent in Canadian history.

• (1525)

Therefore they request that Parliament initiate a royal commission or a wide ranging full public inquiry into the Canadian Armed Forces, including the reserves, to investigate, report and make recommendations on all matters affecting operations, tasking, resources, effectiveness, morale and welfare.

MAHESH INDER SINGH

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of our colleague, the member for Nepean, I have the duty to present a petition from the Sikhs of Canada concerning the pending extradition of Mahesh Inder Singh.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT, 1995

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): **When we interrupted debate to go on to question period, the hon. member for Chicoutimi had about ten minutes left.**

Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was just telling this House that we should at least confirm that Quebec must be represented by 25 per cent of the members of the House. I was also wondering why the rest of Canada was so afraid, why some people are trying to deprive us of the perfectly legitimate right to equitable representation. Furthermore, on April 4, the leader of the opposition in the National Assembly of Quebec, the kid brother of the federal Liberals, presented exactly the same motion as my colleague from Bellechasse.

I repeat that Quebec has a legitimate and, above all, an historic right to a minimum of political power in the Canadian federation. As things stand right now, we do not get our fair share of federal transfer payments and defence spending and we have showed this on a number of occasions in this House. Just this morning, one of my colleagues pointed out that we do not get our fair share in R&D, nor do we get it in job creation, and that is hardly all.

Besides this reduction in its representation, Quebec will be facing other similar inequities in the next few months. I was wondering: What does the Prime Minister think of that? What do the hon. members for Gatineau and Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine think of that?

In the last vote on this issue, on March 28, I did not sense much support on the other side of the House. I can hardly understand what is going on. Is it not true that, in the political history of Canada and Quebec, the legislator has often expressed the will to assure regions, especially remote and rural regions, of a fair representation in the House of Commons? As long as the current formula for seat distribution between the territories and the provinces set out in the Constitution Act, 1867, as amended in 1915 and in 1976, is not changed and that this Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act remains relatively unchanged, is it not obvious that the same principles of representation for remote and rural regions should apply, especially to Quebec?

All members know that until Quebecers make a decision in favour of Quebec's sovereignty, it is very important that this province maintain a minimum representation of 25 per cent in all federal institutions.

• (1530)

As surprising as it may seem and in spite of all the constitutional mechanisms aimed at protecting provinces that are experiencing a relative population decline, one province has always had fewer seats than its share of the population ever since Canada was born 128 years ago. And, of course, some people will say that the fact that it happens to be Quebec is just a coincidence.

Even the most densely populated province, Ontario, was given several extra members at the beginning of the century and eight extra members after the 1941 census because it was considered to be experiencing a relative population decline due to the rapid growth in the western provinces. I will say however—and this should not come as a surprise to anyone—that Quebec which, at that time, accounted for 33 per cent of Canada's total population did not hold 33 per cent of the seats in this House. And, today, we have trouble holding on to 25 per cent. From 1867 to 1995, we never had extra seats, even when we could have demanded it. Is this double standard really acceptable? I submit that it is not and that it should not be.

I strongly believe that the constitution and the elections acts must reflect the Canadian duality and thus guarantee that Quebec retain a quarter of the members in the House of Commons until the people of Quebec decide otherwise. Beyond party or partisan considerations, this proposal, once again, is true to the traditional demands of Quebec. I remind you that this proposal got the support of the Liberal Party of Canada in the last round of constitutional negotiations. The hon. member for Papineau—Saint-Michel surely recalls it unless he has a very short memory.

It would be a lot wiser for the government to wait a few months before putting this legislation forward or, better still, put it off indefinitely. Let the government deal with this country's real problems. Does it not know that Bill C-69 is going to cost taxpayers an awful lot with its commissions that will have to