

*Government Orders*

The only purpose of this bill is to take away from Quebec its vested rights as a founding nation. Allow me to explain.

It is essential that the historical number of members representing Quebec be maintained. Needless to say that, in a few months, after Quebec has become sovereign, the Government of Canada will be free to do as it pleases. But for the time being, we are still here and our job is to look after the interests of the people of Quebec.

Obviously, the members opposite, the Liberal government, have a short memory. I will try to connect them to reality by stating a few historical facts.

Representation and the description of the electoral boundaries are both calculated according to the rules provided in sections 51 and 51(a) of the Constitution Act, 1867 and sections 14 and 15 of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

The federal legislation on the readjustment of electoral boundaries established an electoral boundaries commission for each province. These commissions are responsible for drawing a new electoral map, in which the population of each electoral district will correspond to the electoral quota for the province. This quota is obtained by dividing the population of the province by the number of members of the House of commons assigned to the province.

There is a section of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act that I find fascinating, namely section 15, which states: "Community of interest, or the specificity of an electoral district in the province or the historical development thereof, and a manageable geographic size for districts in sparsely populated, rural or northern regions of the province".

Last year, when this commission came to Chicoutimi, changes were proposed. Five of the seven municipalities in the riding of Chicoutimi were to be assigned to the riding of Jonquière. The problem with this change is well defined in the section I just read.

• (1350)

First, there is the community of interests. The municipalities of the Lower Saguenay which would find themselves separated have always had economic and social ties with La Baie, which is another major centre of the riding of Chicoutimi. Indeed, several services located in La Baie are provided to Lower Saguenay residents, including the Canada employment centre and the small business development centre.

Second, the area covered by a riding must be taken into consideration. In order to have access to services in the riding of Jonquière, residents of Ferland-Boileau—the municipality closest to the one which was going to be included in the riding of Jonquière—would have had to travel 45 kilometres. This is a

good example of what the Liberal government planned to do in my riding last year.

I am convinced that this kind of nonsense would also have occurred elsewhere than in the Saguenay region. It would be interesting to check this out for the province as a whole. However, given the decisions taken every day by this government, there is no point in doing that. Indeed, the daily actions of the Liberals speak for themselves, which is more than enough.

A few days ago, the hon. member for Bellechasse pointed out that the 1985 legislation on electoral representation was very clear as regards the number of seats to be allocated to Quebec, since it stated that, before any new distribution, the chief returning officer had to ensure that Quebec would get 25 per cent of the seats.

This is not the first time that Quebec gets taken. This unfortunate reality is prevalent throughout the history of our province, which is one of the two founding provinces of Canada. I could mention the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which imposed laws written in English, and which prescribed for public office holders an oath administered under the Test Act, whereby they gave up their Catholic faith and pledged loyalty to the British Crown.

I can also think of the Quebec Act of 1774 and the Constitutional Act of 1791. In a newspaper of the time, it was said that Lower Canada was much too French to be anglicized by English-speaking settlers. Referring to Lower Canada, it said: "This colony is much too French. It must be degallicised. Since Quebec has fallen, it is time for this province to become English." We simply do not forget episodes like that.

Then came Confederation, which finalized a process which had started with the Union Act of 1840. After Confederation, French-Canadians thought they had a treaty between two peoples, between two distinct societies, between the two founding nations, but English-Canadians considered the treaty mostly as a piece of legislation giving the English majority the right to dominate the minority made up of French-Canadians. And why not try to make them suffer, to use a fashionable expression these days. With this bill, the government is trying to remove our vested right, which is the right for Quebec to elect 25 per cent of the hon. members in this House.

• (1355)

As I said earlier, as a matter of good conscience if not of respect, this bill should not be used to penalize Quebec once more. Have Quebec and Quebecers not suffered enough from this domination? As far as I know, Quebecers still account for more than 25 per cent of the Canadian population. So, do you not think it is normal that at least 25 per cent of the members in this House represent Quebec? What is the rest of Canada so afraid of that it feels it has to try so hard to remove our most legitimate right to fair representation?