

Government Orders

perhaps would be interested to meet us but do not have the opportunity.

Mr. Bélair: Telephones help.

Mr. Milliken: As the member for Cochrane—Superior says: “Telephones help”. He has a particular problem given the geographic size of his riding. The country is enormous. Members of Parliament have a particularly difficult role to play, a multifaceted role that involves more than sitting in Ottawa and doing the work demanded of them in this place.

I will continue with the subject of the Constitution.

[*Translation*]

I would like to comment on what the hon. member for Bellechasse said in his speech today and also on what he said Monday in connection with his motion in amendment to this bill.

It is clear that what he wanted to change was really a section of the Canadian Constitution, not a section of this bill. He argued that he wanted a change that would give the Province of Quebec a minimum level of representation or at least 25 per cent of the members. This kind of change would require an amendment to the Constitution Act. Two sections are affected by this proposal, one of which is section 52 of the Constitution Act, 1867, and I would like to read it to the hon. member, although I am sure he has already read it: “The Number of Members of the House of Commons may be from Time to Time increased by the Parliament of Canada, provided the proportionate Representation of the Provinces prescribed by this Act is not thereby disturbed”.

A change of the kind he proposed would clearly change the ratios established by the current legislation with respect to representation of the provinces. This means that to make the proposed change, we would have to amend the Constitution.

The other section that is crucial to this matter is section 42(1) of the Constitution Act, 1982, which reads as follows: “An amendment to the Constitution of Canada in relation to the following matters may be made only in accordance with paragraph 38(1)(a)”. One such matter is “the principle of proportional representation of the provinces in the House of Commons prescribed by the Constitution of Canada”.

So we cannot make changes except “in accordance” with section 38. Section 38(1) provides for “resolutions of the Senate and the House of Commons; and resolutions of the legislative assemblies of at least two-thirds of the provinces that have, in the aggregate, according to the then latest general census, at least fifty per cent of the population of all the provinces”.

• (1710)

So, it would be very difficult to make such a change in the Constitution. We tried to during the debate and the referendum on the Charlottetown accord, but the Canadian people did not want it. I am surprised today that the hon. member for Bellechasse and his party supported such a change to Canada's constitution, after opposing the Charlottetown accord.

The accord would have guaranteed Quebec 25 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons, but they opposed it. What happened? Why are they supporting this amendment to the Constitution in the House today? This is nothing more than a game for them. They are not sincere in proposing such a motion in this House. Oh yes, indeed. And look who proposed the motion: a party that has decided it will not be here after the referendum.

If this party wins the referendum, Quebec will separate from Canada. If it loses, its leader has promised he will resign, and all his members will do the same. How can they propose a change like this to guarantee Quebec a minimum number of seats here in the House, when they do not plan to stay? What is the problem here? I do not understand the position of the Bloc Québécois on this matter. I would also suggest that the remarks of the hon. member for Bellechasse are just another attempt to confuse the issue and give a boost to the separatists' campaign to help them catch up.

Clearly they have problems, and some other issue must be found for Quebec electors, an issue of no importance to anyone.

[*English*]

Everybody in Canada would be happy to ensure adequate representation for every part of the country, but the hon. member for Bellechasse in his speech criticized the fact that Prince Edward Island had a guarantee of four seats. He used that as an argument to suggest that somehow other provinces should also have guarantees.

If we all had guarantees of a minimum percentage we would never make any changes in the representation. Everybody in the House including the hon. member for Bellechasse supported the notion of representation by population in the discussions in the committee. Clause 19 of the bill provides for effective representation based on population. It is the guiding principle for redistribution and was supported by all members. He supports that principle and he knows it.

By his amendment he is trying to raise a red herring that has nothing to do with the bill. It is really an amendment to the Constitution of Canada that he would like to get and that frankly he opposes in relation to certain other provinces that are very small.

I share his views. I do not think anybody should have a minimum number of seats in the House. We should be dealing