

Government Orders

However, some Reform members took the floor to say that the Bloc Quebecois was a party that wanted to break up Canada, that wanted to use the back door, as with Meech Lake or Charlottetown, to arrive at another kind of reform. I would like to tell them that the Charlottetown Accord was rejected not only by Quebec but by all of Canada. I think that Canadians were right to do so. They thought that they should oppose all the elected governments in Canada which were offering them something cooked up in secret that did not at all meet their needs.

As for Meech Lake, Quebec did not prevent it from being passed. Its provisions were certainly a bare minimum for Quebec, but it was not necessarily us who had it set it aside. But it made Quebecers aware that, in the end, our problem is not a matter of plumbing but of architecture.

• (1115)

In this respect, for Canada to take the time to think about the electoral map is not a bad thing because we have basic decisions to make on the future structure of Canada as a whole, whether there will be two countries. It is a decision Quebecers will be called upon to make in the near future. I think it is much more important to start off by settling the basic question of the most appropriate structure for the future we want to have.

As far as "breaking up Canada" is concerned, I would like to say that no country in the world lasts forever. Structures change and, just as the caterpillar develops into a butterfly, there is a way to change and adjust to new realities. Today's economic markets are very big; it is no longer necessary to be as big as the economic markets we are dealing with. That being the case, I think it is important to give ourselves appropriate structures. We can give ourselves enough time to think about what form the Canadian electoral map we lived with last year should take in the future, so that we can make wise decisions and take into account other factors besides population distribution.

In a region such as eastern Quebec, the proposed reform of the electoral map eliminates one riding and creates another where there is a distance of 300 kilometres between two cities. I reiterate what I said earlier: 300 kilometres in summer and 1,000 kilometres in winter. Such decisions or recommendations by a commission fulfilling its mandate under the current legislation were totally inapplicable and unacceptable, and we prepared to intervene before the electoral commission to argue for maintaining the ridings in eastern Quebec. We were ready to do so.

This bill was undoubtedly tabled late because it puts us in a funny situation where we must prepare in case passage of the bill is delayed while fulfilling our mandate as members of Parliament because, as members of the Bloc, we made a commitment to look after Quebec's interests. We are doing so now in the current context, under this government, to ensure that, if Quebecers decide to stay within Canada, they have the best tools available. But we think they will make a different choice, especially when we see the federal Parliament spend so much

time on such issues that we are entitled to question effectiveness and dual representation in Canada. I think there are more fundamental issues to put forward before spending a whole day debating whether the suspension period should be 12 or 24 months.

We could ask ourselves whether it is worthwhile to spend so much time debating this. I think the Reform Party should examine its amendments to this bill when it argues, strangely enough, that the Bloc Quebecois wants to break up Canada, since the Bloc will vote with the Government of Canada on this bill. It is not a matter of basic principles but of effectiveness, political realism and respect for the people who should have enough time to influence the political system and the electoral commissions so that future decisions take into account other factors besides the purely demographic aspects provided for in the act, as I was saying earlier.

In conclusion, I think it is important to take into account, for example, the number of municipalities or the area to be covered so that when the map is redrawn in 24 months, it will be what Quebecers and Canadians want, unless Quebecers decide before then to give themselves a political structure that is much more appropriate for their development.

• (1120)

I am confident that is what will happen in the coming year. I think we should put all our energy into making our political structures more adequate and not only into fixing the plumbing.

[English]

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver): Mr. Speaker, at a time when our dollar is plunging and our interest rates are on the rise, the Liberal government should be ashamed of what it is trying to do with Bill C-18. It is imposing the will of unhappy Liberal MPs on the voters of Canada, members who perhaps are worried that they will not be re-elected to collect their gold plated pension plans.

I do not think they will be re-elected anyway. Therefore, they should support the amendments that we have proposed or preferably should defeat this Bill C-18 altogether.

Without regard to the huge investment of time by the Electoral Boundaries Commissions and without regard to the millions of dollars which have already been spent on a non-partisan process, the government is going to ram through an ill-conceived and selfish piece of legislation.

Politicians have no business setting their own electoral boundaries. Human nature dictates that members could act in their own interests to trim areas of opposition from their ridings or to add little pieces of support to their ridings. Even if that did not happen there could be the suspicion that it was happening.

The important thing is that the whole process should be seen to be non-partisan. Politicians should have absolutely nothing to do with the process.