

*Government Orders*

province appears to the commission to render such waiving necessary or desirable. In other words, the provincial commissions now have a much broader criterion when looking at particular cases.

I think that a region like the Gaspé or the Magdalen Islands, even the Lower St. Lawrence, would have benefited much more under this criterion than under the extremely restrictive wording being proposed to replace it. This may not be as bad as the initial suggestion to include a schedule of the ridings in the act and freeze them, thus giving a form of statism to the act and to the list of ridings and making it extremely difficult to work with.

Consequently, the official opposition considers clause 19 to be a major obstacle and cannot support the bill.

Clause 16 is also questionable and even unacceptable, given what it says and what it does not say.

Following the representations made last summer to the Standing Committee on the Procedure and House Affairs—by the hon. member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead, by the president of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada and, previously, on June 21, by Senator Jean-Claude Rivest of the Stadacona senatorial designation—we understood that the government would be receptive to the traditional request made by Quebecers and their government for guaranteed minimum representation in the House of Commons, as is the case for some Atlantic provinces.

As you know, representation for the Atlantic provinces is guaranteed by the senatorial clause, which dates back to 1915 and which we do not question.

• (1615)

The senatorial clause allows a population of 120,000 people in Prince Edward Island to be represented by four members in this House. Indeed, that clause provides that a province cannot be represented by fewer members in the House of Commons than senators in the Senate. Since four Senate seats are guaranteed to Prince Edward Island in the senatorial clause, that province can also be represented by four members in this House. The same rule applies for New Brunswick, which is guaranteed ten seats in the Senate, under the Canadian Constitution.

Although the number of residents in that province does not justify such representation, New Brunswick gets ten seats and we accept that. The terms of union between Newfoundland and the Canadian federation, ratified in 1949, also contained provisions guaranteeing adequate representation of the province of Newfoundland, both in the House of Commons and in the Senate. In fact, Newfoundland was guaranteed six seats in the Canadian Senate.

So if we agree with the senatorial clause that provides guarantees for Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, why are we up against a wall when we talk about the same guarantees for the Province of Quebec, when we talk about a minimum level of representation for Quebec?

Quebec, which as a people and as a nation, is one of the two founding peoples of this country. We are told this time and time again. We learned this from our history teachers. It is part of our collective conscience as Quebecers that in 1867, Quebecers were one of the two founding peoples. I may recall that on June 30, 1867, the day before the coming into force of the British North America Act, 1867, Quebec, then known as Lower Canada, was entitled to 65 seats out of a total of 130 in the Parliament of the Province of Canada, that is, 50 per cent.

This was agreed to by the members who were elected to represent us at the time—there was no referendum to ask what the people of Quebec thought and certainly not the women of Quebec, since they did not even have the right to vote at the time and the Fathers of the Confederation were all males—but there were no constitutional provisions that provided for minimum representation for Quebec. The only guarantee Quebec obtained was those 65 seats, but 65 out of how many?

On July 1, 1867, it was 65 seats out of 181. Later, when Canada's territory was expanded with the addition of new provinces including Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and finally Newfoundland, Quebec's share of representation in the House of Commons dropped steadily, stabilizing during the past 20 or 30 years at a level slightly over one-quarter. Obviously, the Fathers of Confederation made a mistake by not including a minimum representation clause for Quebec, which at the time should have been 50 per cent.

We can hardly rewrite history and today insist on 50 per cent. People will say: Who do you think you are? We are not in a country that allows such deviations from the norm. Be that as it may, we are not asking for the representation that we had in 1867, in other words, 50 per cent. We asked for a minimum guarantee of 25 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons. In the next general election, should Quebec participate—my good friend from Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine will agree it is pretty doubtful that we will be able to—when the thirty-sixth Parliament is elected, Quebec, for the first time in its history, will fall below this critical mass of 25 per cent, since it will have only 75 seats out of 301.

• (1620)

Hence our proposal, which was akin to the Liberal 1992 proposal. I read on Monday of the pleasure of the hon. member for Papineau—Saint-Michel and Minister of Foreign Affairs at being able to guarantee Quebec minimum representation of 25 per cent, saying that this represented a significant gain for