

*Government Orders*

day to 65 out of 181, or a third, at least theoretically since the elections had not been called yet.

Today, as we sit in this 35th Parliament, we are 75 out of 295 and, should the trend continue, should we remain in this federal system which is relentlessly stifling us, we will have only 75 seats out of 301 in the 36th Parliament. Then it will be out of 310, 330, 340. This is Quebec's slow agony. Today we are called on to say if we accept this slow agony for Quebec, regardless of the referendum results. I am in good company to comment this situation.

Fortunately, we have *Hansard*, the official report of the debates, which allows us to see how our friends in this House looked at this issue, in 1992. I refer especially to page 12795 of *Hansard* of September 9, 1992, in which the hon. member for Papineau—Saint-Michel, the current Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs said, and I quote: "Another demand is the preservation of Quebec's representation within common institutions to fully reflect its particular status in Canada. Item 21 guarantees that Quebec will be assigned no fewer than 25 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons".

The hon. member for Papineau—Saint-Michel goes on to say: "This is in fact an extraordinary gain showing the remarkable generosity of our Canadian partners who thus recognize Quebec's distinctiveness". The hon. member for Papineau—Saint-Michel, who is now a government minister, will surely not change his mind when the matter is voted on. He will surely remember a speech he made as recently as September 9, 1992 and support the amendment tabled by the Bloc today.

Other people not known as sovereignists have considered this issue. These people have expressed conflicting constitutional positions. A case in point is Senator Jean-Claude Rivest who, when he appeared before the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on June 21, dealt in particular with the issue of a minimum level of representation for Quebec, what this minimum level should be and why.

In the June 21, 1994 issue, No. 18, of the Minutes of Proceedings of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, Senator Rivest is quoted as saying: "However, the constitutional system that the Canadian constitution imposes on the various provinces varies considerably from province to province. In particular, the constitutional obligations that were imposed upon Quebec in 1867, and which were maintained in the 1982 Act are much greater than those imposed on other provinces.

One only has to recall the special language requirements imposed upon Quebec concerning the use of French and English in the legislature and in the courts, the provisions that were renewed concerning Quebec pursuant to section 23 of the Charter having to do with the language of instruction, and the constitutional obligation that only the government of Quebec has to maintain two school board systems".

So, says Senator Rivest: "The principle that the various provinces should be constitutionally equal is contradicted by the very text of the Constitution, which opens the way for the government of Quebec to demand, strictly at the constitutional level, i.e. in terms of the House of Commons, the Senate and the Supreme Court, special constitutional status that corresponds to the sociological, linguistic and historical reality of Quebec within the Canadian federation".

• (1645)

Senator Rivest added: "One example would be the 25 percent representation rule within the House of Commons, along with the fact that in the current Senate, Quebec has a markedly greater representation than do the other provinces of regions of Canada. A second example would be the Supreme Court. Only Quebec is guaranteed three seats on the Supreme Court. So when it came time to negotiate about the House of Commons, as I just said, we demanded 25 percent representation. From a federalist point of view, the basic problem of Quebec's society—and this is still Senator Rivest talking—and not the problem of the province of Quebec, is that it is inconceivable and no doubt unacceptable for Quebecers, for Quebec's society, to be part of the Canadian federation without the assurance and the constitutional and legal guarantees that the various Quebec governments have always sought and with which Quebec could retain, at the institutional level, not a majority, not equality, but enough of a critical mass to have influence corresponding to its historical, sociological and cultural reality within the Canadian federation. For Quebec, this is something that is not negotiable".

I am quoting Senator Rivest, who has not yet joined the Yes camp in the referendum debate. I asked Senator Rivest this last question when he appeared before us: "If Quebecers were to decide to postpone their move toward sovereignty, would you now be in favour of including a constitutional clause that would guarantee them 25 per cent representation"?

Senator Rivest replied: "I think that no matter how the Senate is reformed, it will be extremely difficult for the Premier of Quebec, assuming that the federal system continues, to agree to any constitutional standard, regarding the number of members, that would be below a 25 per cent threshold".

I just quoted two staunch federalists, two people who actively participated in the abortive attempts to reform Canadian federalism.

I see across the way some of the members who supported this minimum of 25 per cent, this critical mass that Quebec so badly needs in this House. The member for Cochrane—Superior voted in favour of the motion, as did the member for Saint-Maurice and current Prime Minister, the member for Sudbury, now Minister of Health, the member for Papineau—Saint-Michel, of course, after what he said, voted in favour of the motion and, oddly enough, the only two paired members, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands and the former Solicitor General, Mr. Lewis. I hope that he will not be paired in the vote, and that