

Government Orders

problems, cognate as they may be, are to be handled in other bills. Therefore, I think it is a significant advance.

It does not, I repeat, replay Charlottetown. The Charlottetown accord was quite decisively voted on by the people of Canada and is now in the dustbin of history. Parts of it were interesting and valid and may be worth bringing back but that is a matter for debate elsewhere and on another occasion, not here.

While I appreciate the eloquence of the hon. member for Mercier and the contributions he made to the debate, I do not think it really bears too much on the mandate of the committee.

I appreciated the remarks of the hon. member for Calgary West. On many of the matters he has raised a great deal of research has been done by him and by others. There are points that I might share with him but again, I do not feel that for this particular bill this is the occasion to get into these matters.

I take pride as a member of the committee concerned. It worked very well. It is an attempt to replace a system that was somewhat arbitrary in the sense that the commissioners were selected by a process in which there was no real review. They were not required to provide criteria for their decisions. In essence we had situations where decisions could be, as was said of Lord Eldon's chancellorship "an inequity as long as the chancellor's foot". That is not good constitutionalism.

This is a good step forward. It is on that basis I commend it to the House.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Mercier (Blainville—Deux-Montagnes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite, in referring to the speech by the hon. member for Mercier, indicated his interest in what she said and, in turn, I may say I was very interested in the way the hon. member opposite used examples from other countries and went back in history to support his argument.

I would be interested to know whether he was aware that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Hungarians within the Austro-Hungarian Empire were in a situation quite similar to that of present-day Quebecers in the Canadian federation. In other words, they were an unhappy minority. They rebelled and were defeated, but subsequently, the Austrians, who were the ruling majority in the Empire, decided to negotiate and in the process recognized the so-called double monarchy, a structure in which both peoples, the minority and the majority, enjoyed a certain level of equality to defend interests they might or might not have in common.

In the same century there was another situation very similar to ours, and I am referring to the Norwegians who were not happy about being part of the kingdom of Sweden. They were an unhappy minority. Like the Hungarians, they rebelled, and were defeated. Subsequently, the Swedes agreed to negotiate and recognized a status also referred to as a double monarchy, which

also included a parity structure that was different from Parliament but nevertheless a parity structure. I may recall that, in the twentieth century, both Hungary and Norway became independent. They were recognized as independent states.

I want to ask the hon. member opposite whether he feels—and he may not agree—that in this Parliament, representation should be based on population?

• (1310)

Does he agree there are two founding peoples here and at what level would he see a parity structure that would recognize that fact, or does he deny there are two founding peoples in this country?

Mr. McWhinney: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his remarks. I am quite familiar with the history of the Austro-Hungarian empire and its particular constitutional theory. I make reference to it in a number of my books and am very often quoted by learned Quebecers in the debate on the development of the quiet revolution.

Nevertheless, all of the facts must be examined. The Austro-Hungarian empire was not a developed democracy as we know it today. We must also recognize that the dual monarchy was, in a way, intolerant of the rights of other minorities. The claims of the slavic minority were not recognized, which gives us cause to look at the failure of the Austro-Hungarian empire, in view of its defeat in the first World War.

Comparisons may be made between Canada and the Austro-Hungarian empire of the 19th century, and in particular the Ausgleich agreement, as it is known in German, of 1867. However, very very few of them may be made. As to whether the Canadian constitution can accommodate a situation similar to that of the Austro-Hungarian empire of the time, I would like to point out that the federal system is very flexible and capable of accommodating many different constitutional arrangements.

The prerequisite today, however, is that these claims be approved by popular vote. This is the fundamental reason for the failure of the Charlottetown accord. Under these circumstances, should the question arise in the future, yes, our federal system can accommodate any constitutional variation, provided it has been submitted to and approved by a popular vote.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in deference to the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra, I will not ask a question outside the scope of the bill, but rather one within its scope.

He made some comment about the constitutionalizing of these provisions. One thing that is being kept in the bill which is in the existing legislation is the variation of 25 per cent from the quotient for the size of populations of electoral districts. He will also know that in this bill not only do we keep that variation in normal circumstances, but we continue to leave open the possi-