

acquired during close to ten years in the House of Commons.

I myself welcome a personal friend and I know I am expressing the sentiments of the Official Opposition when I tell him we are delighted to have him among us. I shall add that I have no doubt the Senate as a whole is very pleased to welcome him to this chamber.

Nevertheless, adding one senator to the Official Opposition group does not correct the unacceptable imbalance between the group of government supporters and the Official Opposition group, which includes two Independents and one Social Credit senator.

Since 1963, the number of senators belonging to the Conservative Party has decreased from 34 to 17. Only 20 senators are not members of the Liberal caucus. The government can depend on the support of three quarters of the Senate. Our system, as conceived, devolves a definite and heavy task on the Opposition, which it cannot accomplish without being in sufficient number.

May I recall that the former government leader in the Senate, the Honourable John J. Connolly, stated on several occasions that the number of senators in the Opposition should never be less than one third.

In any case, the Senate can trust that the Official Opposition, with the means at its disposal, will nevertheless do its utmost to discharge fully its duties.

[English]

Honourable senators, I would now like to congratulate both the mover (Senator Hicks) and the seconder (Senator Lafond) of the motion for an Address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Of course, Senator Hicks has brought to this house a lot of experience in public affairs and excellent qualifications as an orator. His contribution to the debate was interesting in many respects, but especially in the strong condemnation he made of the Income Tax Act in urging that it be amended in depth. That part of his speech would have fitted in very well when the so-called tax reform bill was before this house at the end of December, 1971.

• (1420)

Honourable senators will remember that the tax bill was forced down our throats by a majority of government supporters in this house, despite the warnings of many on both sides that numerous provisions of the bill were seriously deficient and would create extensive confusion—the kind of confusion Senator Hicks denounced yesterday. It would be interesting to speculate as to whether Senator Hicks would have made the same speech had he been here then or whether he would have ignored his leader's directive at that time to abstain in order to help towards quicker passage of that legislation by the famous deadline of December 31, 1971.

[Translation]

As for the speech of my friend, Senator Lafond, I can only praise it. As usual, he expressed his thoughts with poise, subtlety and effectiveness. It is always a pleasure to listen to him.

[English]

The results of the October 30 election have produced a situation in the other place which is without precedent in

[Hon. Mr. Flynn.]

the political history of this country. For all practical purposes, the two major parties are on equal footing. On a purely mathematical basis, the Liberal administration could justify its remaining in office in order to find out whether Parliament was prepared to support it. Nevertheless, the election was unquestionably a major defeat for the Trudeau government. If there was any victor, it was Robert Stanfield and the party I have the honour of leading in this chamber.

True, the support that each of the major parties received across Canada has produced a rather confused picture, which lends itself to various interpretations.

Apart from Quebec, where the Liberal Party retained its historical strength, and apart from New Brunswick where there was a split, each party winning five seats, the remaining eight provinces returned more Conservative members than Liberals to the House of Commons.

The result in Quebec, in my opinion, requires close scrutiny. It cannot simply be taken at face value. The government obtained only 49 per cent of the total vote. This percentage slides down to around 43 per cent, if you exclude the Island of Montreal where most of the English voters reside. The division of the anti-Liberal votes between the Conservatives and the Creditistes has had much to do with the practical success of the Trudeau government in Quebec.

Many objective Quebecers, insightful observers of the political scene, would agree with me that it is regrettable that historical circumstances have permitted the support of the P.C. Party to decrease to the point where it has not been able to elect more than a few members since the election of Sir Wilfrid Laurier in 1896. With the exception of 1911, when 27 members of the coalition of Nationalists and Conservatives were elected against 37 Liberals; of 1930, when the Conservatives won 24 seats to the Liberals 40; and of 1958 when the Progressive Conservatives won 50 seats and the Liberals 25, my party has not done well in Quebec.

I suggest to you that it is a bad situation for Canada and for Quebec when one of the only two parties capable of forming a government cannot obtain a minimum of support in Quebec, in French Canada. Some say that the Tories are anti-French. To me, that is entirely false. It is just as false as the intended corollary to the effect that the Liberals are the party of the French Canadians.

I entirely reject the recent lamentations of certain Grit militants. The election of October 30 was definitely not a backlash against Quebec. Not a single responsible and knowledgeable editorialist in the province of Quebec has accepted that thesis.

The plain fact is that outside Quebec the issues which dominated the campaign were the problems relating to our economy: inflation, unemployment, taxation, and other matters of the same kind. It was those very same issues which, in Quebec, incited 51 per cent of the electors to vote for parties other than the Liberal Party.

How can we speak of a backlash in Ontario where the Liberals took a beating? Yes, they took a beating, of course, but if there had been a backlash they would not have elected 35 members as compared to 40 members for the Conservatives.