

*Government Orders*

huge areas extend even further. I find it very odd indeed that the Reform Party should take such a stand.

It also seems to me that, beyond the mathematics of representation, the idea is to ensure that representation is fair and accurate. Fairness is not just a matter of arithmetic. Otherwise, this whole thing could be resolved with a calculator and we would save a great deal of money. But when one riding covers, say, six blocks in Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver while another one encompasses 55 or 60 municipalities, should we not take into account other criteria to ensure that rural and urban ridings are equally represented in this Parliament?

I do not think that anyone here will deny that these circumstances affect how we carry out our duties and that we need different ways to reach out constituents, one being to reduce the number of constituents in all ridings. It was just established that the act already provides sufficient variances to ensure this kind of representation in the future.

We were asked earlier how we, from the Bloc Québécois, could not share the triple E Senate vision of the Reform Party. It is because a triple E Senate would exacerbate the problem. In a triple E Senate, all provinces would have the same number of representatives. I have nothing against the people of Prince Edward Island, but let us compare the size and population of this province to Ontario, Quebec or British Columbia.

Quite obviously, this is not an adequate solution. In any case, Quebecers had at least 15 other reasons to reject the Charlottetown Accord and this is certainly not the only one which led them to reject that deal. The accord, which was bad for all of Canada, had been cooked up by negotiators behind close doors. Afterwards, we realized that the people they claimed to represent had no intention of agreeing on such a deal, and they massively rejected it, which was a good thing for Quebec and Canada.

As regards the second amendment proposed by the Reform Party, it is important to look at its impact, for example, on the Magdalen Islands, in Quebec.

• (1630)

The Magdalen Islands are a very distinct region of Quebec. My Bloc colleague mentioned that his riding is too large, but there are other specific realities which have already been acknowledged by the federal government, such as being islanders. The distinct riding is gone. However, these constituents can benefit from what I would call a greater open-mindedness, a wider vision in terms of Quebec's development.

In the Quebec Election Act, the Magdalen Islands are deemed to be an exception to the rule of 25 per cent. In fact, they are currently the only exception in the Quebec legislation. Everyone is pleased because we provide specific representation to people

who have very specific and distinct problems, as can be seen right now with the fishing debate.

We should ask the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine to tell us about his experience as the member representing the Magdalen Islands, as well Bonaventure. How can he ensure adequate representation for both regions? This is almost impossible.

The member finds himself dealing with chambers of commerce which are unhappy because their interests are not properly looked after. It is not necessarily a matter of individual qualifications but probably far more a question of being able to represent all one's constituents. How can he do his job as a member in Ottawa, as well as representing Bonaventure and a district 500 kilometres away, surrounded by the sea?

I think that if the Government of Canada wanted to show that it understands the particular needs of regional development and especially this region, it would accept the proposal presented by the Bloc. At the very least we must defeat the amendments proposed by the Reform Party which would preclude any flexibility in this respect. I think we have to send a message to that effect.

I would like to take this opportunity to respond to a question I was asked in committee, a question I felt was particularly insulting to the people in my area. The hon. member from Kindersley—Lloydminster asked me whether it was to protect the electoral districts consisting of 100 per cent, "pure laine", French Canadians, as he put it, that I was telling them to protect the five counties in Eastern Quebec.

At this point, I had to give him a history lesson, because he was unaware of the fact that in addition to francophone communities there were also anglophone communities that were established long ago, at the time the Loyalists left the United States to settle in the Gaspé.

There are also aboriginal communities in these ridings which would like proper representation. So our intervention was not to protect the French Canadians in this area but to ensure that all citizens enjoy adequate representation.

I think this is symptomatic of the contempt in which the Reform Party holds members of this House and the role they have to play. I do not think anyone in this House makes representations to ensure he will be re-elected. In any case, changes are so unpredictable.

If during the last election, the Conservatives had done everything they could to protect themselves, instead of two members they might have had four or five, but basically, the result would have been the same. I do not think members make proposals to protect their ridings but to ensure that citizens are satisfactorily represented.

So, I believe it is important that all groups in our society, all individuals, but also the type of communities that they form—