

*Government Orders*

We must be able to hold serious discussions in an effort to address the problems. My father told me that, long before I was born, electoral boundaries were imposed on Quebecers even though 80 per cent of them voted against them.

Later, the Constitution was patriated unilaterally without the agreement of the Quebec government under Mr. Lévesque or of the federalist governments that followed. We are still living with this Constitution today but the Liberal majority does not have a problem with it just because one of the provinces did not sign the agreement, and that is very difficult for us to accept.

However, I did like one element of the presentation by the hon. member across the way. He said that we should sit down and negotiate. I think he should speak with his leader and all Liberal members because it is obvious that the leader of the government has repeatedly denied the need to amend the Constitution.

It is clear that the current Prime Minister is trying to make Quebecers forget their own reality by providing good government for both Canadians and Quebecers. According to the figures we got earlier today, we are for the first time in 125 years the province with the largest number of poor people in Canada. This kind of situation calls for fundamental changes. If the system has produced such results for 125 years, the only solution, in my opinion, is to get out.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

• (1655)

**The Deputy Speaker:** As no other speaker wishes to ask a question or make a comment, we will resume debate. The hon. deputy government whip.

**Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, most Quebecers do not agree with the position of the last speaker and obviously do not want to leave Canada. This is why Quebec separatists have postponed the referendum.

I would also like to remind the Bloc member that Quebecers rejected the constitutional amendments that would have guaranteed them a percentage of the seats in the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker, before I continue, I want to point out that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

[*English*]

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak on this bill. It really is an extremely important bill, which deals with how we as Canadians determine how we will be represented in our House of Commons.

While I have had the privilege of being a member of the committee on procedure and House affairs, which dealt with this bill, I joined the committee only part-way through the process. I am aware that the members of that committee spent a great deal of time on it. It was an innovative process in that it was the first

time a committee fulfilled a mandate that we as a government promised to give members of the House of Commons, as members of committee, to actually initiate legislation, to bring legislation forward to the House from the members of this House as opposed to from the government.

I want to compliment those members of the committee who have been on this project since the beginning for the excellent work they have done and the detailed consideration they have given to all aspects of this bill.

I said it was an important bill and it is. It deals with how we are represented democratically as Canadians. That is a very difficult issue in a country like ours, which is so disperse, so disparate, so diverse geographically and demographically.

We have huge concentrations of people in urban centres such as Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and yet we have huge and vast expanses of the country with very little population, with very little opportunity for people to have direct contact with their elected representatives.

One dilemma the committee faced was how to deal with equal representation by population for people in very concentrated areas and in very dispersed areas.

It is not an easy challenge. One has to recognize that representation by one's elected representative is more difficult when the member of Parliament has to travel perhaps thousands of miles even to see the parts of his or her constituency. One may have a very small population in a vast northern riding or in a riding such as Labrador and still have less contact with one's constituents than with a much larger population in an urban area that is much more compact.

• (1700)

The committee has proposed some innovative ways of ensuring when riding boundaries are decided upon. Of course they will not be decided by us but by independent commissions. However those factors will be taken into consideration. The very unique nature of this country will be taken into consideration. Ridings will be constructed so that people are equally well represented regardless of geography, dispersion of the population, sparsity of the population, or concentration of the population.

I did want to speak about the whole concept of community of interest. That very clearly is a factor many of us felt was not adequately respected in the previous report of the electoral boundaries commissions, a factor that I feel has been tremendously strengthened in the legislation now before the House.

One must not only look at numbers when deciding on ridings, how large they are and what their boundaries are. One must look at the commonality of interests in the people to be represented by the same member of Parliament. Do they identify themselves as a community? This is probably nowhere more important than in deciding what groups of people are going to be represented by