

francophone minorities in parts of the country where they do not represent enough of a population to have a real democratic voice. They have spoken for cultural minorities. They have spoken for aboriginal people. They have spoken for the poor. They have spoken for religious minorities within the country. And in each case they have not said, as it states in the resolution "We have the power to defeat any bill coming from the House of Commons and we intend to do it". They have said "Look again at what you are trying to do". They have said to Canadians "Look again at what this destructive government is trying to do to our beloved country". That has been the role of the Senate under present arrangements.

If there is light at the end of the Meech Lake tunnel, the light is that we can develop and I am confident that we can do it. I hear so many talk about the obstacles and the vested interests. I do not believe it. I believe there is a great will in this country to have a Senate that will work for us.

A lot of people believe that Ontario and Quebec will never relinquish their control of the Senate in terms of the numbers of seats they have in relation to the other regions of our country. Madam Speaker, I know it is not news for you, but I think it is news for a lot of Canadians to know that that is just not true.

The number of seats from Ontario and Quebec do not constitute a majority of the number of seats in the Senate. They constitute less than a majority and, speaking as a member from Ontario who has watched the Senate over the years, I cannot remember when it was significant in any of our decisions that the Ontario delegation was more substantial than the delegation from two or three other provinces put together. That is not the way the Senate was inclined to operate.

I want to talk for a moment about some of the evidence that did not get the attention that it should have, that was brought before the committee chaired by the hon. member for Sherbrooke on which I had the great honour to serve, about some of the interesting features of the Senate. Ontario now has 24 seats. If you go by population, it should have 37. I would like to say, if I may interject, that this is evidence given by a lawyer from Winnipeg, Patrick Riley. These are statistics that can be confirmed.

Supply

Quebec has 24 seats; by population it should have 27. So already the two big provinces are disproportionately under represented. The Senate is a legitimate voice for more than just rep by pop. British Columbia has six; it should have 12 by population. The reverse. Alberta has six; it should have ten by population. Manitoba has six; it should have four. Saskatchewan has six; it should have four by population. Nova Scotia has ten; it should have four. New Brunswick has ten; it should have three. Newfoundland has six; it should have two. P. E. I. has four; it should have one by population. Then, the Northwest Territories and Yukon, by population, should not have any seats; they have two. I do not agree that this is good advice. I do not think what the composition of an improved Senate should be. I am very taken with the idea of equality. The triple E is one that I am anxious to know more about and to discuss. But here are the facts.

When we are looking at what will follow Meech Lake, we should be looking at things like this. We should not be looking at the historic and anachronistic fact that in 1867 a deal was made on the establishment of the Senate which, even then, was the most controversial issue in the formation of Canada. There were more arguments about how the Senate should be formed and what delegations should come from each province than there were about almost any other issue, including the place of minority language rights in our country.

We have been complaining about our Senate for 120 years. Here is a member standing up, wanting us to pull the trigger that the Constitution gave us 120 years ago, over the democracy which we have built by having senators who have been restrained, discreet, intelligent and effective when they have chosen to speak up for interests that this government has cared so little for and has done so much to abuse.

I know this motion is not coming to a vote. I am hoping, as much as a patriotic Canadian can hope, that the serious issue of Senate reform is soon before us because it will mean that we are moving ahead in building our country not moving backward, as the NDP wants to suggest for a cheap political shot.

Mr. Ross Harvey (Edmonton East): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member.