

Government Orders

It was then that my grandfather understood that the debate in Canada would always be about who best answered the question "Will French Canadians be treated as the equals of English Canadians?" This was how he saw the situation. He used to say that the British North America Act had been signed by Quebec, by Quebecers, because they felt it gave them a minimum of security with respect to their expectations.

The same man, several years later, voted for what was called the Bloc populaire. This party was no longer talking about equality in Canada. This came after a very significant moment in history when the importance of the 25 per cent was brought home. It was when Quebecers voted in an overwhelming majority against conscription, but had it shoved down their throats anyway.

Our great fear is that without this guarantee in the future, you will treat us more than ever like a minority, systematically reducing our representation to 15, 12, 10 per cent and maybe even achieving what some might like to see happen. But if we do not get this commitment from the present government—and I think that the proposed amendment is an amendment in principle—it will be a clear message, a very symbolic and significant sign that Canada no longer wants Quebec, no longer wants it to play the role it has always played since the introduction of the British North America Act.

In voting on this amendment, the Liberal majority, and Reform members too, because we are told that it is a free vote for them, will be making an important statement. Furthermore, I have the impression that there are among the ranks of the Reform Party a few hon. members who will, on their own, decide that the amendment is very acceptable.

In conclusion, I would say that this type of amendment is one of the very reasons for our presence here. The Bloc was elected to defend the interests of Quebec, to let Quebecers see the machinations of the system, because if we had not been here, this amendment would not have been tabled. If the Bloc Quebecois did not form the official opposition, if it were not a significant party in the House of Commons, there would never have been a debate on this issue. Our question to the federalists is this: "Are you ready to let Quebec take its rightful place or do you want to put it in its place?" I hope that you will make the right choice.

[English]

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a few brief comments on the matter raised by hon. members opposite.

• (1715)

I listened carefully to the remarks of the mover, a colleague with whom I have worked on a number of parliamentary matters.

I have to give him great credit for working very well in the parliamentary committee system and making a significant contribution there and in the House.

I listened carefully to the remarks of my colleague from Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. On the issues of providing a minimum number of seats in Parliament to the province of Quebec and of capping the number of members elected in total to Parliament, I think members opposite would find a fair bit of support on the government benches, at least for the capping.

I can only speak for myself. If the Constitution is capable of providing a floor for the province of Prince Edward Island for a particular reason—whatever it was at the time—I do not see why the people of Canada would not be prepared to discuss a floor for the province of Quebec for whatever reasons exist at a particular point in time. I can see what the reasons are, as can members opposite.

Conceptually I do not have a problem with capping or with floors if that is what the political discussions yield. However, those discussions, those changes are constitutional as my colleague from Kingston and the Islands has pointed out.

We are not going to be able to wag the dog with its tail here. Capping of the House of Commons and providing a floor to a particular province or region is a constitutional matter which we are incapable of addressing in this bill.

The Speaker has already ruled that the motion is not out of order. We could legislate. However, given the remarks of my colleague from Kingston and the Islands, I am not too sure that adopting this provision would have the result intended. It might skew the interpretation of the Constitution.

I wanted to signal to my colleagues opposite that I hear, I understand and I am not unsympathetic to the concept. However, I believe it is constitutional. It is odd and I find it odd. I know members opposite will understand that it is peculiar to say the least that members opposite would be looking for changes in a Constitution they have indicated they wish to abandon within a few months.

That regrettably points out perhaps an Achilles' heel, perhaps a weakness in the perspective of the Bloc, which makes a contribution to the problem. We do not always agree; many times we do not. However, to the citizens in the province of Quebec, I think it is fair to say that the only way we will get constitutional resolutions to the many issues that may confront Canada is to get back into that envelope of discussion. That is in the hands of the Prime Minister and the premiers. It is a matter they do not want to address now.

At the present time we have to deal with redistribution the way it is. I want the record to show those remarks.