

### *Government Orders*

really just come out of the hurried negotiations in the summer of 1992. I decided to do a little bit of research and confirmed that was the case.

• (1245)

Perhaps we have overlooked something, but I cannot find any record of a major Quebec actor demanding a guarantee of 25 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons prior to the Charlottetown accord.

I would say that there are some origins, which may be in the Victoria conference proposal. In 1971 the Victoria constitutional agreement proposed that every province that at the time had at least 25 per cent of the population be guaranteed a constitutional veto indefinitely. This would have given Ontario and Quebec a veto over any changes to the Constitution. Of course it was ironic that that accord also failed, partly because of the attacks by the Parti Québécois and the separatists in Quebec at the time. But ultimately, the accord was rejected by Quebec federalists as well.

Once again, the fact of the matter, as far as we can tell, is that this is not a historic demand, although like so many things in this country it has become a demand from the very separatist element that rejected it in the first place, much in the way certain versions of the Confederation agreement are now endorsed by the separatists who rejected that agreement at the time.

I want to get to the fourth Bloc contention, that somehow the failure to give Quebec a guaranteed representation in the House of Commons represents a violation of the agreement of Confederation. It is particularly interesting how it can represent a violation of an agreement that never existed. There never was any such provision in the Constitution of 1867.

In making this argument the Bloc Québécois has pointed out the fact that in the old Canada, the union of the two founding provinces we hear so much about, the union of 1841 to 1867, Quebec had 50 per cent of the seats and there was a dual premiership, as members will recall.

Confederation came about because that arrangement broke down. It was completely unworkable to have the principal House where the guaranteed number of seats is invariant to population and where there will be some kind of equal marriage. It did not work. It brought about Confederation. And if Confederation were ever to fail for Quebec, as the separatists suggest it will, then of course the rest of Canada would never enter into an agreement that would recreate a union that already fell apart in the 1800s.

It is important to remember what the agreement of 1867 did. It did not guarantee Quebec a percentage of seats in the lower House, as we had had prior to 1867. It had three separate elements that dealt much more creatively with the concerns of

Quebec and with the other regions and the new partners of Confederation.

First, it created the House of Commons, where representation would be on the basis of population, a principle understood in every democratic country in the world.

Second, it created a federal system. This is something we should not forget. Colleagues in the Bloc always say that Quebec's power at Confederation fell from 50 per cent to 35 per cent. In fact it did not. Its share of the seats at this level of government fell from 50 per cent to 35 per cent, but the most important feature of Confederation was the creation of a federal system and the creation of the province of Quebec as a separate legal entity. The Confederation agreement gave Quebecers local autonomy through their provincial legislature over a number of exclusive provincial jurisdictions.

I should add that my party is opposed to the historic attempts of the federal Liberals to undermine those exclusive provincial jurisdictions. Those jurisdictions should be respected, and in our view the federal spending power should not be used in a way that intrudes upon those exclusive competencies.

Third, the agreement of 1867 created the Senate. It created a separate chamber, one of the purposes of which was to provide guaranteed representation for various regions of the country. I have spoken on this many times, as members will know. That is in fact the chamber where regional representation for Quebec and for other provinces was to be guaranteed.

• (1250)

That part of the accord has not worked out the way the regions of this country would like it to work out. One of the things that constantly mystifies us as western Canadians is the demand of Quebec separatists to abolish the upper chamber, rather than make it the very basis of regional representation that we in the regions of the country want against the enormous population weight of Ontario. That is rejected time and time again, although it is a feature of virtually every democratic federation in the world.

The history of that, I should point out, is quite interesting. Quebec was originally guaranteed 33, a third of the seats in the upper House. Later, as this country grew, as western Canada entered, that guarantee fell to 25 per cent, since we recognized four regions. Today, of course, we have seats for Newfoundland and the territories, which are outside of the original regional agreement.

There has been a guarantee in this Parliament for Quebec to have a certain representation. That representation is guaranteed in the Senate. Our provinces in the west would like to see that chamber become more effective. We would like to see ourselves guaranteed effective representation as well. That is the way to address this issue.