

The Address

Being a democrat, the member for Burin—St. George's should agree with the Opposition and abide by the Quebecers' ultimate decision.

Mr. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for La Prairie for his question. In fact, that is precisely what I said in my speech. I said that the decision will be made by Quebec voters and I also said that it should not be made in this place. I am convinced that the time has almost come for Quebecers to examine that question. I cannot agree more.

As to his reference to the referenda—there were two in Newfoundland, in 1948—my father and my mother took a decision they believed to be right. I do not dispute the fact that if the various areas of a province can decide one way, they also have the power and the right to decide another way. This is what I said; I said people in Quebec will decide, not the citizens of the whole of Canada.

Mrs. Maud Debien (Laval—Est): Mr. Speaker, following consultations with my colleagues on the government side and in the Reform Party, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to allow the hon. member for Bellechasse to give his speech in response to the Speech from the Throne.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is there unanimous consent to authorize the hon. member for Bellechasse to deliver his speech in full?

[English]

Mr. Keyes: Mr. Speaker, if the House is adjourned at the conclusion of the hon. member's allotted time then given the new era of co-operation in the House we would be in agreement with that suggestion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, allow me, as is the custom, to congratulate you and all the others who will sit in the Chair and play such an important role in this House. I have been here just a few days, but I can already appreciate the tact and the competence of the Chair.

• (1605)

I especially want to thank the hon. member for Burin—St. George's for his eloquent speech on the right to self-determination. The member is himself from a nation, in fact the only nation to do so in this country, which has freely and voluntarily decided, through a referendum held in 1948, to join the Canadian federation. If a referendum is the process used to join the

Canadian federation, it is now clearly established that a referendum is also the proper way to create a sovereign State.

Since the House started sitting, I have not been surprised by the fact that our Liberal friends across the floor keep referring to their red book. This book was their election platform and they won a majority of seats by referring to it. As well, I am not surprised when I hear my friends from the Reform Party talk about changes, even cuts—we are not yet dealing with the details regarding social programs—and talk about reforming the voting process or adopting a different approach regarding ministerial responsibility. Indeed, this comes as no surprise since the Reform Party's campaign was based on that theme. Therefore, why should you be surprised to see a Bloc Québécois member, who campaigned on the sovereignty of Quebec, come in this House and talk about Quebec's sovereignty? We were elected to do just that. It is our *raison d'être*. It is the mandate of our party to defend and promote Quebec's sovereignty, a sovereignty which is not directed against anybody but, rather, which is premised on the self-determination of our nation in order to be able to treat on an equal basis with any other nation, including our Canadian friends and neighbours, who are of course particularly close to us geographically, but more importantly because of our common past which has promoted the development of such strong friendships over decades and even centuries.

We asked ourselves the question raised by the hon. member for Papineau—Saint-Michel who said: "But who speaks on behalf of Quebec?" I disagree with a lot of comments made by the hon. member for Papineau—Saint-Michel, but it is true that this question will have to be answered.

The hon. member for Burin—St. George's said earlier that this is not the place to decide over Quebec's sovereignty. I agree with him. The decision will not be taken here; it will be taken in Quebec, by Quebecers, who will be asked to vote on the issue following a debate which we hope will be as open and as enlightening as possible. So, we need to hold a referendum to settle once and for all the issue of the legitimate right to speak of Quebec, because Quebec never was a truly sovereign state, unlike the Dominion of Newfoundland, which, before 1949, was as independent as the Dominion of Canada.

Without going back to ancient times to establish the rights of aboriginal people, we know that Canada existed before 1867. We can describe the institutions which have made Canada what it is today. I will touch briefly on some of the events.

Our first very own institution was set up in 1663 and was called the Sovereign Council of New France. Of course, this council emanated directly from the French monarchy, an absolute monarchy which did not stand for any division of power with a Parliament.