

• (1905)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member knows that this is a question for debate and not a point of order. They will get a chance to speak, but it is now the turn of their colleague—

Mr. Plamondon: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I insist.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member for Blainville—Deux-Montagnes want to yield to his colleague?

Mr. Mercier: No, Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Richelieu on the same point of order.

Mr. Plamondon: I ask that the words radical and extremist applied to the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste be withdrawn because they are unparliamentary.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Blainville—Deux-Montagnes, on debate.

Mr. Mercier: Mr. Speaker, I am willing to speak now, but I think that it was not the order in which it was agreed to do so.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Trois-Rivières has the floor.

Mr. Yves Rochelleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today in this debate about the contribution of the Patriotes of Lower Canada and the Reformers of Upper Canada to the democratic evolution of our representation mechanisms.

I am all the more pleased to speak on this November 1, 1994, because exactly seven years ago today, on November 1, 1987, we lost a very great Quebec patriot, a great Quebec democrat, the former premier of Quebec, Mr. Lévesque, who invited Quebecers to believe in Quebec, who gave confidence and pride to Quebecers and invited them to describe themselves and to consider themselves as a people with the highest political status.

I would hope that in the upcoming referendum campaign, Quebecers will remember and emulate that great man, René Lévesque.

I am also very pleased to take part in this debate that was raised by my colleague from Verchères, whom I want to congratulate and who has moved the following motion, that I would like to read in order to put things in perspective:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should officially recognize the historical contribution of the Patriotes of Lower Canada and the Reformers of Upper Canada to the establishment of a system of responsible democratic government in Canada and in Quebec, as did the Government of Quebec in 1982 by proclaiming by order a national Patriots' Day.

I am all the more proud, and even a bit moved, because I participated myself in the celebrations that, for thirty years now, have been held in commemoration of the 1837–1838 events that

Private Members' Business

occurred in Saint-Denis sur Richelieu, in Quebec. I would like to take this opportunity to thank and congratulate two residents of that village who, certainly for twelve years I think, have organized these celebrations with efficiency, skill, modesty and so much dignity. They are Mr. and Mrs. Onil Perrier from Saint-Denis and they deserve our most sincere gratitude.

To understand fully the evolution of these so-called democratic mechanisms, we have to go back to 1791, about forty years before the 1837–1838 events, when the Quebec Act created two provinces, Lower Canada and Upper Canada, Quebec and Ontario as we know them today.

From a political point of view, we must remember that this act established four precise levels of power which were the source of frictions that caused the events we all know about. The first level of power was the governor and his bureaucrats who formed an oligarchy named clique du château, or castle clan, in Quebec and Family Compact in Upper Canada or Ontario. Then there were the Executive Council and two other houses, the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly.

• (1910)

Not only were the governor and the executive council not accountable to the people and the elected representatives, but they also had the power to revoke laws passed by Parliament. The legislative council was clearly a patronage heaven and became a kind of branch of the executive council where people would exchange friendly services, serve on one council and then on the other and even, at times, on both councils at once.

During all those years, there was deep discontent with the legislative council within the population. When the 92 resolutions were presented in 1834, 31 concerned the Legislative Council, and this discontent was prevalent among both francophones and anglophone progressive democrats.

At the time, the legislative assembly, consisting of elected representatives and members, was just a debating society, like the National Forum on Health which the Prime Minister of Canada supports, a debating society without any real power, except the power to run its own activities, but when it appointed a speaker, Louis Joseph Papineau, his appointment was turned down by Mr. Dalhousie, the governor at the time.

Throughout this period, the demands of both Patriotes and Reformers touched on a number of points, the most important one being responsible government, which would make the executive accountable to the people and their elected representatives.

Another demand concerned the right of the members of the Legislative Assembly to control appropriations and how tax money was spent, and to have a say in the appointment of senior officials. Finally, another demand, still very relevant, was that the legislative council, more or less the equivalent of the other