

members in the House of Commons. That failure in particular prevents our party from endorsing the bill.

The changes made to the boundaries process while useful for future census in our view do not justify scrapping the commission or rejecting the reports of the existing boundaries commissions.

While we are opposing this bill members of the Bloc Quebecois have been opposing this bill for an entirely different reason, one to which I will address my remarks.

The Bloc position on this entire process for bills C-18 and C-69 has been very inconsistent. It supported going through this process and then opposed it again.

Initially the concern was about boundaries. Now the concern is about Quebec's not having a guaranteed 25 per cent of the seats. Under the formula coming forward I will point out what we are actually talking about in terms of substance. We are talking about the demand from the Bloc Quebecois that Quebec be guaranteed 25 per cent of the 301 seats we will have out of this redistribution; in other words 75.25 seats. Quebec will get under the formula 75 seats. This is probably the most verbiage we have expended in the House over one-quarter of a seat.

• (1240)

I am not entirely sure this position is not changing again. Over the Easter break we learned from the leader of the Bloc Quebecois that apparently Quebec now wants 50 per cent of the seats. The position keeps shifting.

I want to address it seriously because there has been much misinformation and many misstatements made about this. I will outline the facts. The Bloc has made at least four assertions which need to be challenged, assertions of fact, assertions directly related to the bill and to the issue of 25 per cent of the seats.

The first and most obvious Bloc assertion is that this kind of guarantee could be achieved without a constitutional amendment. We know that is not the case. This was a provision of the Charlottetown constitutional accord opposed by the Bloc Quebecois which I will talk about later. It was in that accord precisely because it required a constitutional amendment.

The Constitution Act of 1867 lays out the formula for the redistribution of seats in the House of Commons every 10 years. That formula is contained primarily in section 51. Section 52 makes it clear that while the number of seats in the House can be changed, the House is not free to amend its formula in a way that would depart from the proportion of population among the provinces. Section 52 makes clear that principle is protected.

Government Orders

Furthermore, under the Constitution Act of 1982 under section 42(1)(a) the amending formula is explicit that changing the proportion of seats in the House can only be done with a constitutional amendment approved by Parliament and by two-thirds of the provinces representing at least 50 per cent of the population.

The second incorrect Bloc assertion is that under existing constitutional formula only New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island are guaranteed certain representation in the House of Commons. This is also not true. Section 51(a) of the Constitution Act of 1867 makes it clear all provinces are guaranteed in the House of Commons at least the number of seats they have in the Senate. That was a provision added in 1915.

Obviously under that provision it has an immediate effect on the representation of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, whose seats would fall below 10 and 4 respectively if that were not there. It also applies to all provinces. Quebec is in effect guaranteed 24 seats by that provision, many more than New Brunswick or Prince Edward Island, although Quebec has many more seats.

As well, the Constitution Act of 1982, section 41(b), the amending formula, makes it clear this particular provision as it relates to any of the provinces can only be changed with unanimous consent. We are all aware of the difficulties in getting unanimous consent. I will talk later about some of the things we would like to see. Clearly that is not in the cards today if for no other reason than all governments in the country realize they could never get the support of the Government of Quebec for any step, for any constitutional change, for anything positive or negative.

Another point where the Bloc is not correct in claiming that only New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island are protected is there is an additional grandfather clause in section 51 of the Constitution Act of 1867. It is not an especially protected section but it guarantees to all provinces the representation they had in the House of Commons in the mid-seventies, a provision my party does not support and a provision that can be changed through an act of Parliament but which this bill does not change. Under that provision Quebec is guaranteed the 75 seats it has today. Were it not for that provision Quebec's share would probably fall by one or two seats.

The third Bloc assertion in this debate that has not been correct is that the demand Quebec be guaranteed 25 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons is one of the historic demands of the province of Quebec. I found this particularly interesting. I worked for the no side in the constitutional referendum. An argument frequently made both inside and outside Quebec was that this provision of the Charlottetown accord guaranteeing Quebec 25 per cent of the seats had in fact not been a historic demand of the province of Quebec and had