

Representation Act, 1985

country that has consistently looked to the federal Government for regional development policies. Those regional development policies have been effective over a long period of time and have given northern Ontario a very major role in the economy of this nation. Consequently, we are asking that we have a voice in this House of Commons.

There is great distress and concern about the impact Bill C-74 will have on this region of northern Ontario. The people of this region are not asking for anything that is not already the pattern in Canada. It is not interfering with the independence of electoral boundary commissions by asking to establish a floor for northern Ontario. We are simply asking for some justice and fairness.

The Hon. House Leader has looked after his province well. There is a guarantee of 14 seats there. That is how it should be, but we are saying that what is good for Saskatchewan should also be good for northern Ontario, because there is a parallel. I thank you for your patience, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I believe the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) has a question or comment.

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I believe we are dealing with the amendment moved by the Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme), that the House return Bill C-74 to the committee to reconsider Clause 2. Clause 2 deals exactly with the difficulties of representation by population referred to by the Hon. Member.

It was my understanding that in the amalgam formula which existed before the Bill was presented, we in Ontario were to have 105 seats. According to the formula in Bill C-74, Ontario would have 99 seats, an increase from the actual 95 seats. What does the Hon. Member believe will happen to those four seats? Am I to take it they will not go to northern Ontario?

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the point I was trying to make. There is no guarantee at all that there will be a floor level of representation for northern Ontario.

The number of seats will increase for Ontario, as it should because the population of Ontario has grown. We know that most of the additional seats should be going to the heavily populated part of the province.

We are not asking to be given more representation in northern Ontario. Those of us who represent very large ridings are not crying to the House that we have too much geography to represent and the size of our ridings should be reduced so that we have more Members. If that were our complaint, we could rightfully be accused of self-interest. However, we are not pleading for ourselves, we are pleading on the basis of a well established principle in Canada of providing a floor. We now accept that as a principle because we know that strict representation by population creates unfairness and injustice. It does violence to the federal system.

We are saying that what is good for a great province like Saskatchewan ought to be good for northern Ontario. It is not

additional seats we are seeking, it is a level of representation. Although that level of representation is difficult at the present time, Members of Parliament and the citizens of northern Ontario are prepared and willing to live with it.

● (1130)

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to have this opportunity to speak once more on Bill C-74. What we are talking about here today is the very key to representation from all parts of Canada.

Federalism can be defined by its regional structure. If that regional structure is not allowed to show itself in representation in this House, we will gradually move away from a federal Government and we will have more and more regions feeling isolated because of variations in representation. The regions will feel again, as they did many times in the past and will, I am sure, in the future, that they will have to start espousing separatist sentiments.

In the West, not one election goes by when there are not candidates who put themselves forward under a variety of names representing groups of people in the regions who feel that they are being isolated and do not have the kind of representation in the House that they should have. If, over the years, we can satisfy the population of the entire country that it is being well represented in this House, then those tendencies for certain groups of people to espouse a separatist philosophy will hopefully disappear.

Even those people who are the most vocal about separating the West, the East or Quebec from the rest of Canada have a certain desire to remain a part of Canada, but at certain times they feel that nothing is going the way it should go, so consequently they look at a separatist approach. Even though we are only debating today a Bill which deals with representation and the number of Members allowed from each of the provinces, we should be working toward a kind of federalist structure that allows the regional nature of the country to be recognized.

We have made a certain amount of movement toward the recognition that sometimes representation by population cannot be the basic structure for representation in this House.

We have come to recognize that once in a while it is necessary to ensure that a particular area is fairly well represented and that it should have more Members than it would have if the population were simply divided by 300, it being the number of Members allowed.

We have varied the formula for Prince Edward Island, the Arctic, the Yukon as well as certain other provinces in order to make sure that they will have a continued representation even if their population relative to that of the rest of the country decreases. Although this Bill does deal with that factor, we have not put in place as effectively and knowledgeably as we should have the kind of formula which would make areas like western Canada know that by 1991 or 2001 the trend will be to make sure that representation will be adequate for the remote areas. That is the main reason why we are not particularly happy with this Bill.