

*Government Orders*

must respond to quickly and come to grips with, without us adding other contradictions like reducing the number of ridings.

The commission's proposals to readjust the current boundaries of Eastern Quebec ridings raise many questions. I speak as the member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup but also as chairman of the Bloc Québécois caucus from Eastern Quebec. I also think all members from the East are surely aware of the impact such a decision would have. We would much prefer to maintain the status quo and, in that sense, the bill would allow the elections commission to gain time, maybe to think of other criteria to be considered in future, and to come up with much more reasonable solutions.

In conclusion, I would say that figures sometimes speak louder than words. Let us look at the geographical size of the existing constituencies: Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine would go from 8,155 to 11,375 square kilometres; Gaspé would go from 12,268 to 17,783 square kilometres and would become part of the new Gaspé—Matane constituency; Matapédia—Matane would disappear; Rimouski—Témiscouata would go from 6,367 to 8,564 square kilometres. In the case of Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, or Témiscouata, it would go from 6,367 to 8,564 square kilometres. Those are truly huge areas, which it would be almost impossible to represent adequately.

The Bloc Québécois is pledged to protecting Quebec's interests. For us, that means promoting sovereignty, but we are also representing a population which will have to make a decision regarding its constitutional future. We certainly do not want to abdicate our responsibilities by saying that, according to our scenario, there will not be another federal election. We want to be totally honest and ensure that, regardless of their decision, those whom we represent will enjoy the best possible conditions, whether it is within the Canadian federation if they so choose, or in a different structure.

In conclusion, it is important to support this bill, especially considering the savings involved, since the amendment proposed by the Reform Party would result in hearings being held and in a postponement of the debate. We would end up wasting money on a commission with no specific criteria, and we would still have to look at the whole issue later on. Let us be clear with the public. They just voted in an election, they can wait a little for electoral reform to be completed. It may be that the definitions of RCMs were taken into account in establishing the criteria and that is interesting. However, as regards the rest of this process, let us give ourselves some more time. That way, if we have to use that electoral map again, Canadians will be ensured of the best possible representation.

• (1640)

[English]

**Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of the bill and the motion currently before the House.

I am not surprised to see a number of the opposition rising and joining what has been called around here from time to time the ranks of the perpetually indignant. I know of what they speak because it was not but a few months ago I sat in opposition myself.

They are upset or feign being upset because of the use of time allocation. I understand that too because I sat over there. There is a reason the government believes that the time should be allocated. I ask the members opposite, as we have debated this throughout today would the result be any different in the ultimate vote if we had extended the time for debate? Under all the circumstances I think not.

I want to explain why I support the bill. Notwithstanding that I have a riding with over 150,000 people, I could sure use a smaller riding, as could my staff. So could many other members whose ridings exceed the norm of 90,000 or 100,000 people. That is one reason I might want to see this redistribution process go ahead immediately.

I come from the province of Ontario which would get another four seats in the process. Therefore my Ontario colleagues and I would probably want to see the bill go ahead and we would have another four seats. Why do I not want that to happen?

The reason is that the process as currently constructed will increase the membership in the House of Commons to 301. That is a very significant item because a close look at the statutes indicates that growth continues. It goes on and on over the years. MPs have realized it is time to put a stop to that.

I want to correct one item. One of the members who spoke within the last half hour said the last time there had been a change in the electoral boundaries was in 1980. That is not accurate. The last electoral boundary change took place for the 1988 election. I know because I was elected in 1988 on the new boundaries. The process took place in 1986–87. It is not long ago that redistribution took place. I have nothing against redistribution, in fact I am in favour of it.

Getting back to what I was speaking on a few moments ago, I sit on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. About a month ago the Chief Electoral Officer was before us describing the process.

At that time I and other members spoke on the issue of the increase in the number of members. For every new member we add to this House, it costs the taxpayer roughly half a million