

Electoral Boundaries

of this region because of its industrial activities were to be combined. Because of their status, Rouyn and Val d'Or should be included in two different ridings; the social balance of northwest Quebec might depend on such a distribution; the economic development of the entire region will most certainly depend on that decision. Physical communications throughout this vast territory is, in my opinion, closely connected to that fact.

It is therefore for all these reasons, Mr. Speaker, that I should like the House to look fully into this matter and I dare hope that it will do so not in order to fill what might be a gap but rather to act for the future benefit of a large part of Quebec, namely the northwest Quebec. I know that the town councillors of Val d'Or would particularly like their city to be part of a constituency including all the northern part of northwestern Quebec, or the Abitibi constituency, as was suggested in the project tabled in the House in February 1976. Of course, the airport of the city of Val d'Or must serve all that part of James Bay, all the enormous development which is now taking place in northwestern Quebec. It would therefore be only logical and desirable that Val d'Or form part from now on not of the Temiscamingue constituency as suggested in this project, but rather of the Abitibi constituency.

Mr. Rod Blaker (Lachine-Lakeshore): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the first thing I should do—and it might be better if I spoke in English—would be to urge the other members to join me—

[*English*]

It was with some surprise, Mr. Speaker, that I learned that the last speaker, the hon. member for Papineau (Mr. Ouellet), has reason to receive the best wishes of the House. I would be most disturbed if my comments now were to be taken as being political input. I would simply ask the members of the House if they would give me their attention for one moment because I understand that today is the birthday of the hon. member for Papineau, and it might be a good time to wish him well.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Blaker: I am not entirely sure whether or not anything that I have to say in this redistribution debate will be of any effect whatever. This matter has been going on now for approximately four years and I have been rather intensely involved, not only as a member of parliament from the province of Quebec but also because of my role as chairman of the privileges and elections committee. I have also attempted to assist other members from time to time, particularly in what is called the West Island of the Island of Montreal.

I have seen the riding that I represent divided into three parts. I have then seen it brought back together again. I have seen changes made to the organization of the riding; it was originally organized on a north-south basis, and it is now reorganized on an east-west basis. Finally we have the riding as it is at the present time.

I want to take only a few moments of the House's time to address myself to the commissioners in an attempt to try to explain some of the rather curious problems that result from the manner in which the riding of Lachine-Lakes-

[Mr. Ouellet.]

shore, or as the commissioners propose to call it now, the riding of Lachine, is to be organized.

I would point out that we amended the law on redistribution, if I recall correctly, about two and half years ago at which time it was suggested that all redistribution commissions across Canada would take serious account of the desirability of not dividing municipalities. Having done that, unfortunately the redistribution commission of the province of Quebec, or perhaps I should say the federal Election Boundaries Commission of the province of Quebec, has found it necessary to divide one of the oldest communities on the face of Canada, the city of Lachine.

I am not going to use the technique known to some members of the House and to some politicians in Canada of attempting to blame the commission for doing something that is unfortunate or distasteful, at the same time attempting somehow to make every effort to persuade the federal Election Boundaries Commission for the province of Quebec to reverse itself. I fully recognize that the law requires of the federal Election Boundaries Commission that we have an approximate average of 83,000 people per riding in the province of Quebec. I fully recognize as well that this results of necessity in the division of the city of Lachine.

● (2050)

I do not want to blame the commissioners. In fact I would support what the hon. member for Papineau has just finished saying, that the commissioners by and large in my view have done an excellent job in the province of Quebec. I do not like the fact that they have decided to divide a municipality like this, and I know for a fact, because these commissioners have stated so publicly, that they did not like the idea of dividing the municipality. However, we are faced with an overriding law and I think it would be improper for a commissioner or any member of parliament to attempt to go against the entire system, whether it be the Electoral Boundaries Commission or the House of Commons, by overriding that law.

Having said that, I can only suggest through this House that I would rather hope the shift of population in the area which I represent will in due course, by the next election after the one coming, provide for the entire city of Lachine being returned to the federal riding of Lachine.

That leaves me with the problem as to what the commissioners did to the boundaries of the riding I currently represent. If I may, I would ask for the sympathy not only of the commissioners, and this is the method by which we address ourselves to the commission, but also of whichever members of the House of Commons may be interested in this particular problem.

I find that the Boundary Commission has taken a particular street in my riding, that is, 24th Avenue, and extended it beyond the physical extension of the street itself. The result of this is that my neighbouring member of parliament, who happens to be the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand), and myself, and three other candidates for the three other parties for each of the two ridings, making a total of eight candidates at the next election, will be meeting halfway across the floors of dozens upon dozens of stores, warehouses, shops and whatever.