

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Solberg: Mr. Speaker, certainly I recognize there are differences from community to community. To the greatest degree possible boundaries should recognize this and try to embrace communities where there have been traditional boundaries.

However the first principle, the driving principle in my judgment, has to be representation by population. At the end of the 20th century we do not yet have a political system that either serves people on the basis of representation by population or contrarily has a counterpoise through a triple-E Senate. It is time that we started to move toward that.

In our amendments to Bill C-69, the one that called for a 15 per cent variance would have given us a closer system. That has to be the first principle that drives any changes to the boundaries. The second principle should respect trading areas and things like that. We agree with that absolutely. Let us not make that the first principle.

Canadians are democrats first and foremost. I think they would like to see a system that is based on a more democratic type of system.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Burnaby—Kingsway—Turkey; the hon. member for Bourassa—Immigration.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the start of this the last statement on this bill, I would like to identify my reasons for opposing it.

First, the Bloc Québécois was elected to defend Quebec's interests and to promote sovereignty. Personally, as a member, I said, obviously, that I wanted to protect the interests of the people in my part of the country.

When the electoral map is to be redrawn resulting in the disappearance of one of the five ridings of eastern Quebec—be it Gaspé, Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine or Matane—Matapédia—or a change to the riding of Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup or Rimouski—Témiscouata, I believe it is important that all members of this House understand the need for legisla-

tion permitting true representation of the people, one that would not be simply based on a mathematical computation.

To this end, while we have been in this House, we have made representations to the electoral boundaries commission, we have spoken during second reading, we appeared before the standing committee. After all that, I would once again ask people to make sure that consideration is given to a region's natural configuration in the make-up of federal ridings, if the federal map is to be used again.

• (1635)

I gave as an example my riding of Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. If the electoral map were ever changed, I would like the people in the RCMs concerned to be asked what riding they would like to be in in order to be sure that people are where they want to be and not stuck somewhere as the result of mathematical or geographical calculations that have nothing to do with reality.

When changing electoral boundaries, we are reminded of the past a bit—very large ridings across Canada with a scattered population that is difficult to reach. In the past, there have even been protected ridings in Quebec to ensure better representation for anglophones in the Eastern Townships. However, when we consider the electoral map as one of the tools of democracy for the future, we must ensure it provides for better representation and that it is an effective tool for the exercise of democracy.

I have been a member for a year and a half. I think all members of this House think the same way. The work here is apportioned fairly well. Whether we come from a large or a small riding, area-wise, our work is quite similar. However, it is another matter when we are talking about our work in our ridings. Some ridings are located right downtown, a few streets away from each other, whereas the one I represent encompasses a total of 55 municipalities. There are even ridings with 80 municipalities. This all affects the work of MPs and the way they will go about doing it.

The number of municipalities is not the only issue. We should also consider the extent to which government services are spread out in a riding. MPs must try to compensate, particularly in rural areas. In major centres, all of the government services can be found; people in those ridings can always find the office which can provide them such and such a service. But for people in rural areas, the MP's office is often the only resource they have to help them locate the government services they need. The workload, therefore, is heavier and when a riding is particularly large, this obviously has an impact on the amount of work to be done.

Therefore, it is very important that we take into consideration the size of the territory covered if we want to ensure that MPs will be able to represent their electorate well. They must also be able to see their constituents regularly.