

Representation Act, 1985

appear to be very unfair or at least create an imbalance which I find totally unacceptable.

Take my riding, for instance. I represent a district located between the urban areas of Drummondville, Sherbrooke, Victoriaville and Thetford Mines. Although the population density is very low, the surface area of this district is quite large. And there are the usual daily problems. People are having trouble with the system, with unemployment insurance, and they wonder which office is going to be able to solve their problem. In many cases, people are not quite sure whether they should go to the office in Thetford or Sherbrooke or Victoriaville.

Here, Mr. Speaker, the Member has a responsibility to provide information and act as a guide in order to show people how to access all the services offered by the Government, and heaven knows there are a lot.

● (1240)

The purpose of the legislation as such, and in fact any measures aimed at reducing expenditures, would appear to be both acceptable and praiseworthy, and I think that as the elected representatives of our constituents, we ought to support and encourage such measures.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, we must not forget that the Government through its departments spends several hundred million dollars annually to get its message across to Canadians and to be as close to the people of this country as it possibly can. Unfortunately, every day we are forced to admit that this superhuman effort that is costing us millions and billions of dollars is missing the mark and failing to produce the expected results. Now, under our democratic system, the opportunity is there to use as liaison officers our Members of Parliament who have a genuine role to play in informing their constituents about the Government apparatus.

Mr. Speaker, I submit, with respect, that the Bill before the House today, or rather the amendments, appear to place constraints on this vital and fundamental role of the Member of Parliament, and it does so in the following way, and I will give an example. Technically speaking, in large cities with what could be called a homogeneous population, we could have 200,000, 250,000 or even 300,000 people represented by a single Member, who would be able to perform his duties as a Member to the satisfaction of all concerned because the problems of these constituents are comparable and similar, so that the information they need does not have to be extremely diverse, and so the Member would be able to perform his duties quite adequately. However, there are ridings where because of the vast territory involved and many different problems that may arise, depending where one lives in the riding, a very small constituency nevertheless requires that a Member work full time if he takes his responsibilities seriously.

Mr. Speaker, as a country reaches a certain stage and under a democratic system, I believe there is a cost we must be prepared to pay. I think that we cannot have a real democracy unless we are going to pay that cost, whatever it may be, and I think an exercise like this one should be considered not just in the light of economics but also in the light of the democratic system we have in this country, and our basic emphasis, our basic motivation should in this case be the fact that Canadian citizens deserve adequate representation instead of the consideration that this might cost us an astronomical sum of money.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind you that under a previous proposition the Province of Quebec would have been represented by 79 Members. Had things been left as they were Quebec would have elected 79 Members of Parliament. If the Bill under consideration were to be enforced as is, the end result would be that Quebec would only have 74 Members. Since existing rules provide that a province may not have fewer Members than it already has, the number of representatives looking after the interests of Quebecers would remain at 75. However acceptable it may be, the population will keep increasing and it would be better to have 79 Members, that is four more. With four more Members, Quebecers would have easier access to the Government process and would be able to contact more Members to obtain various information.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I think we should lend a sympathetic ear to those who advocate savings. Still I want to re-emphasize a significant aspect, namely the fact that every year the Government spends hundreds of millions of dollars to communicate with the Canadian public, yet we have right here an institution or a system which enables us to feel the pulse of Canadians through Hon. Members who were elected in full confidence and who are in a better position than anybody else to appreciate the problems facing their constituents. Not only should we enlarge the representation, but we should also make sure it is an ongoing process Mr. Speaker, consideration must be given to saving taxpayers' dollars and to improving communications through Members of Parliament. Given the choice, I would be in favour of electing more Members so that the lines of communication between Canadian men and women and their government would be more open than they are now.

To my mind, the kind of savings that might result from this measure are not really worthwhile because the various departments already spend a lot of money to achieve similar objectives.

That is the contribution I wanted to make in this debate.

[English]

Mr. Arnold Malone (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few moments to give my observations on what I have been listening to the better part of the debate this morning. What I think the speakers are simply saying is that their constituencies are unique. I would be the first to agree with