

*Government Orders*

• (1555)

**The Deputy Speaker:** I thank the hon. member. Many members have already told me that these motions do not belong to the same group. We continue with the group which includes Motions Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7. Then, we will deal with the other group. Has the parliamentary secretary concluded his remarks?

**Mr. Milliken:** No, Mr. Speaker. Do I have any time left?

**The Deputy Speaker:** The time allocated to the hon. member has expired.

**Mr. Maurice Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-69, and particularly on the amendments proposed by the Reform Party. I will start by making some comments on the speech of the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

It goes without saying that, when the member for Kingston and the Islands rises in this House to support the Bloc Québécois, it gives him additional credibility.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead, BQ):** This also reflects the open-mindedness of the Liberal member. I do hope that this expression of intelligence will have a positive effect on his colleagues, but I doubt it. As my grandmother used to say, we have our work cut out.

I support the views expressed by the hon. member for Bellechasse and I reject the amendments proposed by the Reform Party concerning the application of the 15 per cent rule. According to the arguments put forward by the Reform Party, we would not have to conduct an in-depth review of electoral boundaries and it would probably be a simple matter of feeding some formula into a computer which, in a matter of minutes, would come up with a new riding and a new electoral map for the whole country.

It seems to me that the review of electoral boundaries should be a more fundamental and serious exercise than that. Provisions in the bill that would allow a difference of 25 per cent would seem to be entirely justified under the circumstances, for very obvious reasons, especially when we are talking about so-called rural areas, and this applies to many of our Reform Party friends and in fact, to most members in this House. It seems to me that commonality of interests should take precedence over nearly all the criteria that are considered when it is time to review electoral boundaries.

To represent a riding is not just a matter of being here in Ottawa a few days a week to listen to the arguments of other members. It is about considering the interests of our respective communities and making them known to the federal administration, in this case, and it is also a way for us to play a leading role and act as a catalyst in our communities. In other words, commonality of interests is essential.

• (1600)

When I look at my own riding, I remember the readjustment that had been proposed in the now defunct Bill C-18. It would have created a situation that people in the area would have considered absurd. I had an opportunity to make this point during the debate on Bill C-18. My riding was turned upside down. Overnight, communities were grouped with other communities, and one example was the MRC du Granite, whose main city is Lac Mégantic, which all of a sudden found itself in the same riding as Thetford Mines. Now the people of Thetford Mines are all very nice, and its business people are very friendly, including the member for the area and my colleague, Mr. Chrétien.

However, the two communities have very little in common since they did not evolve the same way and do not have the same interests. Geographically, they are next door to each other. On the electoral map, we see that the asbestos area is next door to the Granite region. However, when we consider the background of these communities, including their economy, their educational facilities, where their children go to continue their education, their cultural facilities, we realize that these two communities are not developing the same way and do not have the same geography.

These aspects should be considered when the time comes to revise electoral boundaries. We must consider commonality of interests and the numbers rule should be subordinate to this principle. We need a degree of flexibility that will let us consider commonality of interests. It seems to me that the 25 per cent rule allows for a certain degree of accommodation that encourages compliance with this rule. That is why it is quite natural that the Bloc Québécois should reject the amendments proposed by our Reform Party colleagues and is in favour of maintaining the 25 per cent rule.

I may add, and I am nearing the end of my speech, that we need provisions in this bill that will allow for setting up so-called special electoral districts, in other words, districts that may be under 25 per cent. We gave certain examples. I remember the case of the Magdalen Islands, which for many years, from 1947 to 1968, had been an autonomous electoral district. From 1867 to 1946, the riding was joined to Gaspé and now, since 1968, it is part of the riding of Bonaventure—Île-de-la-Madeleine. This is a case in point, when we consider the very special character of the Magdalen Islands. There are of course other examples that were raised by other colleagues in this House. So again, those were the reasons why we should maintain the 25 per cent rule.

[English]

**Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I must say at the outset of my remarks that I was not prepared to speak today, but after listening to some of the