

in which partisan advantage is put aside and a more constructive all-Party non-partisan approach implemented.

That is not the way the Government thinks. The Conservatives polls are plummeting. The Government is looking toward the next election. No Government in the history of Canada has fallen faster in public esteem or confidence than this Government—

Mr. McInnes: What about the Liberals in the last election?

Mr. Axworthy: No Government has fallen faster in the first year of its mandate. The ratings have dropped in such a precipitous fashion that it is no wonder its back-benchers or newly elected Members are now considering what to do when they reach early retirement. They will fight and scrap for every marginal seat which they think they can acquire and, if they can do it through redistribution, all the better. That is the dominant message which comes through clearly in this particular piece of legislation. They are not concerned about the broader issues and questions about how the country will be represented in a federal system. They are not concerned about the roles of Members of Parliament. My colleague from Toronto talked eloquently about the changing roles of Members of Parliament, the services and the sense of responsiveness which must be acquired in this modern age. He was quite right. Whether one represents a rural riding, an urban riding or a downtown constituency, the demands and interests of people have changed. There is now an incredible overload in the system, an incredible sense of demand for response, information and assistance. I fundamentally believe that the Member of Parliament, in this day and age, in many ways replaces the roles of other institutions simply because of availability. The more we grow away from that principle, the more we attempt to cut the cloth of redistribution purely for political partisan advantage, the more the role is injured or deteriorated. Also it provides opportunity for skepticism and cynicism.

● (1230)

Let us look at the reasons for this legislation being brought forward. No one sees any reference to the critical importance of the role of a Member of Parliament, nor is there any reference to how it fits the future needs of our Confederation. I expect most Hon. Members of the House would have spent some time reading the report of the Macdonald Commission and its discussion about federal-provincial relations. It pointed out that other institutions were increasingly replacing Parliament as the forum for debate on national issues. We have almost institutionalized federal-provincial conferences of Premiers and Ministers. That tendency deteriorates and erodes the responsibility of every Member of the House. It is not helped by the way in which the Government treats Parliament with contempt. It treats Parliament as a place in which not to provide information or debate. We have asked, in all seriousness, for proper answers about the proposals on trade. What have we received from the other side? We have received jokes and buffoonery.

Representation Act, 1985

Mr. Hopkins: Incivility.

Mr. Axworthy: Yes, incivility, but we have not received any answers. The only places where the Ministers of the Government were prepared to address the free trade issue were in a speech in Chicago and in two speeches in New York. They were the only places from which we were able to obtain a broader interpretation of what they planned to do about this crucial issue. They do not involve Parliament in the debate; God forbid that Canadians should know what is going on! We get that kind of information from a wire service story out of New York. I suppose that reflects the basic disregard and disrespect for this institution. Nothing is more clear than the way in which the Government has approached the problem of redistribution.

Earlier the Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior (Mr. Penner) pointed to the area of northern Ontario which has a very special set of requirements and interest in Confederation. If the formula in the Bill is allowed to continue, over the years that part of Ontario will find its democratic rights severely eroded, almost abolished. That is not only true in that one part of the country. This goes back to my basic point—there has been no thought given to the consequences of the Bill. There has been no attempt to provide Hon. Members with any sense of what will be the repercussions of the legislation.

There was a series of committee meetings, but the Government brought in a brand new amendment at report stage, with no by your leave or attempt to relate it back to principles of representation and how regional responsibilities would be affected. Therefore, the only conclusion one can draw from that hasty and capricious initiative is that it was done purely for political advantage, because each day Government members saw their electoral advantage willowing away, disappearing and evaporating. Now they resort to the worst refuge of political scoundrels, that is, an attempt to manipulate the political basis of representation in order to gain some political advantage. That is the shame and tragedy of this piece of legislation. It really disrupts and undermines the principle, practice and tradition of the House of Commons which have existed for decades.

Perhaps, all said and done, it is worth-while, in that once again it will provide a good, clear example, if Canadians need another example, of what motivates the Government. It is not motivated by principle, practice or traditions; it is motivated by political advantage. Perhaps Canadians do not need that lesson brought home; there have been enough examples in the past several months to make the case as clear as possible. However, it is another example; perhaps the most grievous example of all. In this case the Government is reaching back into hundreds of years of traditions and eroding them. Perhaps that is what is most serious about it. It will have its just desserts, because Canadians basically understand that kind of political chicanery. No doubt the Government will pay the price. In that sense, I suppose in our own interest we should be applauding this kind of political manipulation, this abuse of parliamentary tradition. However, the fact of the matter is that Hon. Members on this side of the House feel strongly