

Official papers quoted during a debate should be laid on the Table of the House.

A private member cannot table an official document.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Thus, Mr. Speaker, I regret that I could not get the unanimous consent of the House to table official figures from Statistics Canada—

Some hon. Members: Agreed!

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): If the House agrees, Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that this will help our commissioners make the revision I am asking for. This is the simple reason why I wanted to table this document.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that even if, at the political level, rural ridings have less importance in percentage than urban areas, we must not forget that the farm industry and agricultural producers in Quebec as well as small businesses we find throughout eastern Quebec deserve some consideration, that they have rights and that we should not reduce the number of the hon. members representing them in this House, because it is already too low.

I hope Mr. Speaker, that the Commission will seriously take into account the representations I wanted to make this evening so that in the future those who will survive us can see that we wanted to work very seriously on the distribution of ridings in our province, and also in our country, so that they commend us for the work we did, for our openmindedness instead of blaming us.

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau): Mr. Speaker, I should like to comment very briefly before the House the new electoral boundaries for the province of Quebec, and especially the new constituencies in northwest Quebec. But first, I should like, with leave, to commend the commission for its excellent work on the whole.

I think the commissioners showed great competence in the performance of their duties. Not only were they very wise in the preliminary project, of June 30, 1975, but they were responsive to the population's needs at the public hearings held last summer, especially those held at Trois-Rivières, Sherbrooke, Rimouski, Hull, Amos, Montreal and Quebec city.

I think it is proper to point out in particular theadroitness, humour and understanding of Mr. Justice Chevalier who conducted those hearings in a masterly manner. It is clear, Mr. Speaker, that in such an undertaking, one cannot please everybody.

The commissioners were under pressure because Quebec was to have only 75 constituencies and consequently the commission had to rely on very specific criteria to please both city dwellers and rural communities.

I will not expound for long on the statements made by the hon. member for Bellechasse (Mr. Lambert) who spoke before me and expressed grievances regarding rural communities. Clearly this is no easy task. One must try to maintain a proper balance in such a project and I think that, on the whole, the commissioners did a good job in redistributing the electoral map in Quebec in a manner which, in my view, appeals to the vast majority of the hon.

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members on this side of the House as well as on the other side.

They tried to find a middle of the road solution which, I believe, will meet the needs of practically everybody. It is clear that for certain modalities in some ridings, some cities, towns and communities, certain groups of people would benefit by belonging to one constituency rather than another. But I do not think there is any major flaw in this proposition which I feel should be accepted in the whole because it seems to meet the wishes of the general public.

● (2040)

I would like to emphasize tonight some findings concerning the ridings of northwestern Quebec, not because I represent such a riding, but because these last months I had several opportunities to visit this very beautiful area of our province. I was able to discuss with a lot of people and I must say, Mr. Speaker, that most of them have shown some reluctance towards the redistribution as it affects northwestern Quebec.

As a matter of fact, the new Abitibi riding proposed by the commission will include a section of the northern part of the riding, while the other riding, that of Témiscamingue, will include the two most densely populated, most important cities of this area of northwestern Quebec. I suggest that not only would such a change be drastic in several respects but it could adversely affect to a certain point the very interest of that whole area of Quebec. I do not think we should get serious objections against this part of Témiscamingue—formerly in the same riding as Rouyn-Noranda—being added to the riding of Rouyn-Noranda.

That is why, at the public hearings held last summer in Amos, many people made representations in order that Témiscamingue be finally added to the cities of Noranda and Rouyn. That step is entirely logical and acceptable, and indeed I commend the commissioners for having accepted it.

I think the most serious problem arises when these two ridings are cut off and the cities of Val-d'Or and Rouyn are brought together in the same riding. The problem stems from the fact that those two cities are natural attraction points in that area of Quebec. We might be concerned about the interest of these respective populations if those two cities are brought together in the same riding of Témiscamingue as suggested in the project of February 1976.

But aside from the argument that the population may be concentrated in these two urban areas, there are other factors just as important.

For instance, I point out that Val d'Or and Rouyn share the same communication, health and educational services. Would the new distribution not mean that any subsequent development of this immense territory might be detrimental to the whole area? Would it not be detrimental also to the economic and social development of the neighbouring riding which, according to the February report, would be cut from its main axis of development and influence?

I sincerely wonder how a true socio-economic consensus would be reached if the regional capital of northwest Quebec, Rouyn and Val d'Or, considered as the metropolis