

Government Orders

bility of extraordinary circumstances where those variations will get much larger.

The hon. member will know that in the United States the general direction I think it is fair to say has been partly imposed by the courts over time. In the House of Representatives ridings are created that are almost equal in population, of course with their peculiarities which we would not necessarily allow here.

On the question of variation, as an academic expert I would like him to inform the House why we have gone in the direction of allowing very large variations in Canada, whereas the United States with a country of similar size has been able to create constituencies that are virtually equal in size. Would he like to see our country consider moves in that direction in the future?

Mr. McWhinney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Calgary West for the very thoughtful question. He will know that we discussed this matter in committee and on some of these points our views were closer than the report of the committee might indicate.

• (1315)

The United States constitution, in its evolution, is assisted by the fact of equality of representation in the Senate, so that Americans do not have to justify to the extent other countries do disproportionately large electorates for some states and disproportionately small electorates for others.

The United States Supreme Court has said, at least Mr. Justice Douglas has said, that equal things are to be treated equally, according to the doctrine of equality before the law, but unequal things do not have to be treated with the same canon of legal equality. Putting it this way, I can see the case, as a city member, made for country constituencies, that a lesser number of voters should be tolerated. I can see the case for going to 15 per cent. I had some problems with the 25 but I recognize that in committee, a consensus emerges and one accepts it.

We are not yet in the same situation as Japan where the supreme court had to rule on a situation where the electoral districts in Tokyo had five times the number of electors as the districts in the neighbouring country regions. Obviously that is a disproportion that cannot be tolerated.

Where do we draw the line? The committee, with some accommodation from urban members like myself and the hon. member opposite, tried to recognize the special quality of life of country constituencies and that perhaps a lesser number of electors was required. The 25 per cent has to be seen in that light. However, it would be simpler if we had a Senate with equal representation or something of that sort. The reform of the Senate is a subject on which the hon. member and I have many views, but it is, again, not a matter for this discussion.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak again at the third reading stage of this bill on behalf of the official opposition, the Bloc Québécois, the sovereignist party in Ottawa, on an issue as important as the act to provide for the establishment of electoral boundaries commissions and the readjustment of electoral boundaries.

I would like to explain in very simple terms to the people listening to us that this bill establishes regulations for future federal elections.

At first sight, this bill might seem of little interest to Bloc members. English Canada provinces could settle the matter among themselves since, when the next federal election is held, Quebec will probably be a sovereign country.

However, in October 1993, I was elected—I reiterate this fact because I know that my colleagues across the way like to hear it—first, to look after Quebecers' interests and, second, to promote sovereignty in Ottawa, as I often do.

However, in fulfilling the mandate of looking after Quebecers' interests, Bloc members must be vigilant. It is because of this vigilance that we are denouncing this bill, which goes against Quebecers' interests.

The process that led to the drafting of Bill C-69 went through Bill C-18, which was tabled in this House over a year ago. Bill C-18 suspended the electoral boundaries readjustment process then in progress for 24 months before a new debate on redistribution could start.

Unfortunately, the Reform Party objected to that bill and its proposed 24-month suspension. Nevertheless, the House, as we know, passed Bill C-18.

However, when the bill went to the other House, the hon. senators did the job that Reformers had initiated in this place. The other House included in Bill C-18 an amendment providing that a new bill must be tabled by June 1995 at the latest, or else the old legislation and the commissions suspended by Bill C-18 would be reinstated.

The bill before us has two objectives, the official objective and the unofficial one, which is just as important if not more so: to reduce as much as possible Quebec's political weight in this House.

• (1320)

Of course the strategy has changed. Since Lord Durham tabled his report, English Canada, the federalists have taken a different approach. The approach may be a more subtle one, but the ultimate goal has remained unchanged: the assimilation of Quebecers.